

# **Discontinuity in Narrative Cinema**

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I, Elif Akçalı, hereby declare that the thesis presented by me for examination of the PhD degree is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated.

09.06.2013

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elif Akçalı', with a stylized flourish at the end.



## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the concept of discontinuity both as a storytelling tool and a critical concept in narrative films through a range of examples from contemporary Hollywood mainstream cinema to renowned European modernist films. Films that utilise discontinuity are less dependent on continuity in time, space or causality and they do this in various ways: by breaking the linearity of the narrative, using absences in the causality of a film, disrupting the reality of the fictional world or playing with our expectations in the compositions of frames, scenes or sequences. One of the aims of the research is to articulate the different forms and functions that discontinuity assumes in a diverse selection of films in an attempt to discover the effects of discontinuity on our understanding of a film's style and narrative. The thesis uses detailed film criticism as a primary method for investigating discontinuity and the case studies range from conspicuous examples of discontinuity to seemingly conventional films. Thus, another objective of the thesis is to test the validity of discontinuity as a critical concept in order to find out whether it is useful in contributing to our interpretations of films. The examples here are neither classified nor analysed historically or contextually, but are grouped under the similarities they share in using discontinuity. Nevertheless, the results of the case analyses illustrate common uses in films made within the same period. Through its findings, the research seeks what discontinuity in cinema is, what it contributes to a film's aesthetics and how it changes our understanding of a film's story. It also presents the changing forms and functions of discontinuity in time and how this concept defines and is defined by our comprehension of film style and narrative.

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*Every work begins with an ellipsis, since it omits all that happened before the beginning.*

– Gilberto Perez (2000: 367)

## INTRODUCTION

The past couple of decades have seen a rise in the range of fiction films that experiment with the ways in which their stories are delivered. Some films, for instance, begin from where they actually end and continue without ever returning to a chronological order. In others, non-matching sound and image is not an omitted error but a conscious choice. And some films simply refuse to pursue cinematic conventions that help to establish consistency in time, space and causality. Stylistic practices that were once regarded as unconventional – such as swift jumps in time and space, abrupt endings with no resolutions or unspecified inserts within a sequence – have become more common recently. These films tend to be faster, their scenes more loosely connected and any established element (such as time, space, incidents or characters) less reliable, intact or concrete, consequently making their stories more difficult to follow. Although they all approach storytelling in a similar manner, specific commonalities of these films are not easy to pin down because they vary in genre, subject and form. The strongest characteristics they share are conspicuousness and complexity: all appear to demand close attention and occasionally a second viewing. Arguably the films that can be easily categorized as a group are those in which there is non-linear storytelling. The order of sequences in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), for example, is not clearly marked by any visual or verbal cues; we may not notice that their order is shuffled until we see John Travolta alive after having just witnessed his death or unless we try to make sense of the sudden change in his costumes from one sequence to the other. In *Lola Rennt* (Tom Tykwer,

1998), each episode repeats the same time frame with the same central conflict and the same characters, but decisions affect the times at which incidents happen. The film's subject exceeds the single plot of Lola (Franka Potente) trying to find money for her boyfriend; it emphasises the significance of coincidence and choice in its construction. In films such as *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2001) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) as well as in the ones mentioned above, non-linearity is seemingly parallel with the themes. Confusing at first sight, non-linearity turns out to emphasise, reveal or explain something significant in the films and it has a purpose beyond deviating attention with the disorder it creates.

As mentioned above, however, experiments in storytelling are not limited to non-linearity. Just as the editing in the above mentioned films stands out, so too are different stylistic choices emphasised in other films, such as the abstract sets in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* (Lars von Trier, 2003 and 2005), the short shots in *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001) and *Old Boy* (Chan-wook Park, 2003), the changing of actors for the same character in *Palindromes* (Todd Solondz, 2004), the use of a hand-held camera by the protagonist in *Offscreen* (Christoffer Boe, 2006) and the coil shaped narrative structure of *Synecdoche, New York* (Charlie Kaufman, 2008). When examined closely, in all these films, oddities in style, which by their very oddity become noticeable, express something about the films' subjects. Stylistic choices such as the ones exemplified above are abrupt, but do they alienate the audience or, on the contrary, are they clues about how to follow the stories? Are the stylistic choices solely made for aesthetic concerns or do they contribute to the structure and meaning of the stories? The films that this thesis explores are those that appear to break certain cinematic conventions of temporal, spatial and causal continuity. Style

in these films interferes with storytelling either by eccentric filmmaking techniques such as jump-cuts, abrupt inserts and ambiguous frames or by unusual narrative methods such as repeated scenes, ellipses and fragmented information. Yet the focus of this research is the function of these uses and one of the main questions is whether they allow the films to maintain a coherent structure. The decision about which films to include in this study presents something of a challenge. This is because the range of examples that fits this definition forms a quite heterogeneous group, which makes them difficult to be studied together. What links, one may ask, the editing of *Memento* to the abstract sets of *Dogville* or the fragmented flashbacks of *Eternal Sunshine* to the video recordings in *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005)? The stylistic anomalies of these films appear unrelated, yet the strongest feature that these films all share is the manner in which they incorporate these anomalies into their plots. Explaining what these films are about is almost impossible without referring to their style. In other words, style becomes a part of the films' subjects; eventually, while they vary in genre, subject and form, they all offer a different mode of storytelling with their style. Consequently, we can categorise and study all these films by looking at the way they utilise their stylistic choices as storytelling tools, which involves breaking conventions and disregarding temporal, spatial and causal continuity. The unconventional narrative and visual techniques that they employ do not mean that they wholly disregard their stories. On the contrary, this condition leads to a critical question: do the alternative modes of storytelling offered in these films allow such unconventional uses to act as amalgamating elements for story construction?

The aim of this thesis is to analyse and discuss some of the examples above along with others in the light of a rarely used critical concept, which is also the overarching characteristic that binds them together. Whether they contain non-linear



timelines, an absence of significant elements for establishing time and space, or fragmented scenes, these films can be described using the term discontinuity. As opposed to continuity, discontinuity in cinema is seldom used as a critical term; it is always set against the former as a counter-term, lacking substance on its own. Through employing an unusual style of editing, omitting certain parts of the story or breaking our engagement with the narrative by shifting perspectives, certain contemporary films have prompted use of the term discontinuity along with the terms fragmentation and absence.<sup>1</sup> Once applied mainly to alternative filmmaking practices, these terms have recently started to occur in descriptions of mainstream films. In effect, contemporary cinema has opened up a convenient opportunity for scrutinising whether discontinuity is a valuable critical concept. This thesis, therefore, draws its central research questions from the anomalies and complexities that these contemporary examples exhibit. It is the repetitive unconventional stylistic choices that characterise these contemporary examples which leads to the necessity of studying discontinuity. Observing these examples closely, this thesis applies this concept to a wide range of films and tests its validity for usefulness to discussions of film style and narrative. In other words, it addresses the same questions to past examples in an attempt to discover whether and how they apply. Using detailed analysis, the thesis looks at the past and the present in the light of the concept of discontinuity and aims to delineate the different functions this term has, as well as exploring how discontinuity defines and is defined by our understanding of film style and narrative.

The increase in such films since the mid-1990s has attracted the attention of researchers and scholars, prompting them to study and analyse these films under different categories.<sup>2</sup> Most of the existing studies refer to the films mentioned above,

along with others that are central to this research, such as *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997), *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001) and *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006). Using different methods and approaches, these fresh writings persistently try to understand and define the films' types. It is clear from this cluster of work that these films have led way to an important area of scholarly interest. The following section responds to these debates in order to describe how this project contributes to and diverges from them. It is from these writings that I draw some of the case studies that I analyse in this thesis. Moreover, the basis of my analyses and discussions will be practically built upon and developed from their theoretical and critical groundwork.

### **Puzzle Films, Database Narratives, Forking Plots and More: An Overview of Scholarly Work on the Subject**

The early 2000s saw the first published studies devoted to the kind of films in focus: in 2002, David Bordwell published the articles 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film' in *Film Quarterly* and 'Film Futures' in *SubStance*. The former was about the increase in the pace of cutting in contemporary cinema while the latter discussed 'forking-path plots', films that offered multiple possibilities resulting from one incident. Edward Branigan and Kay Young responded to 'Film Futures' in the same journal issue, initiating a discussion about the nature of the new narratives in these films. The discussion was soon expanded with articles by Marsha Kinder (2002), Jonathan Eig (2003) and Allen Cameron (2006). Bordwell then expanded his own above-mentioned works in a book called *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006); Janet Staiger collected a series of relevant articles in the double

volume special issue of *Film Criticism* (2006) on 'Complex Narratives'. Then, in 2008, Warren Buckland edited a volume called *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*. Articles in this book take contemporary examples as case studies and analyse them by applying to them narrative theories, especially those developed by Branigan and Bordwell. All the studies listed above focus their analyses on the unusual structures of the film narratives. The films that they explore are mainly those that appear to challenge storytelling conventions; for instance, those that have unreliable narration or play with order and temporality. The effect of these films on viewers, as most writers observe, is often confusion, surprise or a sense of being manipulated. The category of films that these studies outline does not entirely match the focus of this thesis, as it is mostly narrative anomalies that they look at, but it is a good reference point to start from.

There are other books that have recently been published that use some of the case studies in this thesis in their central argument. Janet Harbord's *The Evolution of Film* (2007), for instance, re-evaluates a hundred years of film theory whilst accounting for new film technologies and new film categories. Harbord's book is a study of film theory as much as an inquiry into how cinema has come to be defined. Garrett Stewart (2007) engages with individual films more in detail in his *Framed Time* and looks for the differences of the expressions of time and temporality between the digital and film. James Harkin (2009), on the other hand, calls the stylistic tendency in certain contemporary films 'cyber-realism' in *Cyburbia* and links their emergence with the fragmented modes of communication that new media have brought about. Unconventional style and narrative in film have also been an area of scholarly interest in theses and dissertations; non-linearity, temporality and fragmentation in non-commercial and modernist cinema are especially studied

(Powell 1999; Shahba 2001; Tucker 2001). A few recent theses on contemporary cinema have a range of examples that are slightly similar to mine. Their main concerns, however, diverge from my main arguments; most explore issues such as temporality and the impact of digital technology in film, and some focus only on Hollywood; see, for example, Reibling (2004), Isaacs (2006), Brown (2007), Lavik (2007) and Daly (2008). The approaches of these works are less relevant to the intention of my own project; consequently, it is not necessary to review each one in detail here. However, it is essential to give an overview of the group of studies listed in the previous paragraph, as part of this thesis responds to and continues working with topics and methods they have already established.

David Bordwell has been a pioneer in the discussion of this subject; his ideas have inspired new studies as much as they have been criticised and challenged. Therefore, it is necessary to review his work as most of the others refer to it in their discussions. In his 'Intensified Continuity' article, Bordwell bases his argument on observations he makes about stylistic changes in American films since the 1960s: there is a decrease in average shot lengths that causes rapid editing; lens lengths are more freely varied; close-ups have become more common, and cameras are more mobile. Bordwell first offers some probable causes for these changes and then he claims that this is merely an intensified version of classical continuity:

nearly all scenes in nearly all contemporary mass-market movies (and in most 'independent' films) are staged, shot, and cut according to principles which crystallized in the 1910s and 1920s. Intensified continuity constitutes a selection and elaboration of options already on the classical filmmaking menu. (2002b: 24)

Bordwell suggests that no matter how fragmented it seems, this style is designed for the audience and 'this more outré technique doesn't prevent us from comprehending the story' (25). In 'Film Futures' he follows a similar line of thought; forking-path narratives or multiple-draft narratives have 'cognitively manageable dimensions'

(2002a: 91) and they ‘have stretched and enriched some narrative norms without subverting or demolishing them’ (91). Similar to the generalisations he makes for intensified continuity, Bordwell devises a list of characteristics for these narratives in order to support the argument that in fact they conform to the temporal, spatial and causal logic of classical narratives. According to him, the ‘alternative futures’, offered by the splitting of these forking-path narratives, ‘will be adapted to the demands of particular narrative traditions – pruning the number of options to those few that can be held in mind, finding new uses for cohesion devices and repetition, relying on schemas for causality and time and space’ (2002a: 102-103). In other words, for Bordwell, a set of rules for a seemingly smooth and continuous narrative evolved in the early years of cinema and from then on, all storytelling techniques have developed to validate these rules.

Bordwell’s book *The Way Hollywood Tells It* is about contemporary Hollywood cinema and *Memento*, *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) and *A Beautiful Mind* (Ron Howard, 2001) are among his case studies.<sup>3</sup> Discussions in this book revolve around the same point he makes in the articles. The book, therefore, begins and ends with the argument that behind any new strategy of plot and style ‘stand principles that are firmly rooted in the history of studio moviemaking’ (2006: 1): ‘the favoured technical devices have changed, but the spatial *system* of classical Hollywood continuity remains intact’ (180). Bordwell extends his subject by suggesting that ‘the classical tradition has become a default framework for international cinematic expression, a point of departure for nearly every filmmaker’ (12). He equates ‘the premises of classical storytelling’ with ‘the principles of perspective in visual art’ (12). Films that use an axis of action, eye-line matches or establishing and re-establishing shots in any scene, therefore, could automatically be

identified as using classical continuity. This claim stretches the definition of classical continuity so broadly that almost every film in the history of cinema can be included in it. Moreover, Bordwell's writing suggests degrees of classicism; there are more or less classical films. In this sense, classical continuity would be indispensable in any narrative film because its principles, Bordwell argues, 'assure that the spectator understands how the story moves forward in space and time' (119). Storytelling in any film intrinsically moves forward in the linear time of the film's exhibition, but telling can also be done with temporally varying inserts, omissions and irrelevancies. It is only because Bordwell prioritises understanding and making meaning out of a story that he finds it necessary that the spectator be guided by continuity principles. This need also hints at an assumption that he is making: films make sense only with the principles of classical continuity, which is to say that the result of a lack of continuity may lead to a lack of understanding.

In fact, Bordwell admits that '[his] book emphasises the craft of storytelling' (17) and that 'narrative functions tend to tame visual devices' (15). In other words, story is the primary concern of films and it is the story that dictates the style. This perspective prioritises the meaning of the story and consequently a comprehensible pattern for its deliverance. Bordwell writes,

Stylistic devices of all sorts depend on our following of this or that bit of story [...] To study classical narrative forms is to examine how we make sense of story information. So when I talk of structure or style, I'm also talking of how viewers turn dramatic and visual patterns into an intelligible story. (15-16)

In *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, Bordwell summarises classical continuity as being 'intelligible to mainstream audiences' (72). His book's main question is 'How could innovations be made comprehensible and pleasurable to a wide audience?' (73). According to Bordwell, since the 1960s, any storytelling innovation has been in accord with the classical system and what we see today in contemporary cinema is

similar. He argues that ‘mainstream Hollywood can stretch to accommodate [temporal disorders] as long as they rest on a clear pattern of goal orientation and cause and effect’ (92); ‘unusual techniques [are] situated in an especially stable frame’ (78); ‘everything [...] hangs together by virtue of causal coherence’ (92). Needless to say, understanding this pattern requires familiarity on the audience’s side as well. The point Bordwell arrives at is the negotiation of the viewer and the new stylistic devices: ‘The new technical devices, encouraging heavy stylization and self-conscious virtuosity, have changed our experience of following the story’ (180). He admits that ‘compared to productions of the studio era [...], they are more willing to create gaps and inconsistencies, and they strive to make the viewer appreciate their cunning artifice’ (188). Therefore, there is a discontinuity that Bordwell observes to some extent in contemporary examples, but this does not inhibit the viewers’ comprehension.

Despite the fact that it draws attention to the way recent Hollywood films look, Bordwell’s work on contemporary cinema does not do more than provide data with which he illustrates, according to their frequency, the nature of new technical devices used. His central concern is pinpointing the changing formal qualities of Hollywood cinema in general; therefore, as in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), he finds it proper to have a random selection of films to support his arguments. Although he insists that his main concern is storytelling, he does not critically engage with individual films to demonstrate how such formal changes affect the films’ stories. Moreover, he has no interest in exploring the shift in the functions of technical and stylistic innovations since the 1960s; he bluntly reduces their effects to that of conforming to the classical system, which requires that they retain specific references for the audience to follow the story. In contrast, while this thesis agrees with the

proposal that the existence of such stylistic uses as a wide phenomenon is significant, it also argues that the effects on film narrative of such uses are sufficiently important to warrant detailed scrutiny of individual films. Bordwell proves the existence of what he claims to be intensified continuity through the data he provides from many films, but he does not discuss the contribution of, for instance, wide angles, jump cuts or rapid editing to the films' stories. Moreover, he assesses what he calls gaps and inconsistencies in a film's narrative according to the level of obscurity that they create because his definition of continuity equates it with clear and definite meanings.

Edward Branigan's response to Bordwell's 'Film Futures' article is a good starting point to present continuing and challenging discussions around the same topic. Branigan mainly agrees with Bordwell's negation of a lack of continuity in contemporary Hollywood cinema, but there is a crucial element that separates their positions. In 'Film Futures', Bordwell draws attention to those films such as *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1998), *Lola Rennt* and *Smoking/No Smoking* (Alain Resnais, 1993) that present different outcomes to the same action and he calls them, borrowing from Borges, 'forking-path movies' (2002a: 91).<sup>4</sup> According to Bordwell, Borges's infinite future possibilities are reduced to a number that is 'cognitively manageable' (2002a: 90) for us. Branigan, on the other hand, claims that forking-paths exist in all narratives due to the fact that we cannot refrain from producing alternative and non-existent possibilities for any event:

When a 'film text' is seen less as an object and more as a procedure or interactive ground, then it will be seen to be marked by a double process of 'overwriting' by filmmaker and spectator as well as bear the traces of a double suppression – but only barely – of alternative plots and hypotheses that are nearly true, that nearly become realized through filmmaker and spectator. That is, within any film narrative lie alternative plots and failed stories [and] one of the valuable tasks of interpretation is the uncovering of these hidden 'narrative morphs', of these nearly true versions (or drafts) of the plot, which may lead toward – or be the result of – an experience of *deja vu* or the uncanny in watching a fiction. (2002: 110)



Branigan brings out the value of interpretation and suggests that the ‘value of a film may lie not with the explicit outcome of its plot, but [...] in what was nearly true’ (111). He argues that the alternative possibilities in a narrative should not necessarily be presented on the screen; any narrative carries the traces of these possibilities and they can be uncovered through close reading. Branigan’s viewpoint is similar to my own as I believe the richness and complexity of a film not only depend on its plot but also include the implicit hints and suggestions that are usually attained as a result of stylistic choices. Interpretation of a film is achieved through close attention to the stylistic choices it comprises as well as their alternatives that are not necessarily presented. What is ‘nearly true’ is relevant to showing doubt, calling attention, raising suspicion and offering ambiguity. Branigan indirectly points to the fact that what these forking-path narratives explicitly show is embedded in any kind of narrative and can be revealed through interpretation. In this sense, a film’s story becomes a permeable and transforming thing, which is accessible to and completed with both the filmmaker and the viewers. It is apparent from these writings that the writers are concerned more about narrative shuffles and the way they enrich or obscure the meaning of a story. These forking-path movies are indeed the focus of this thesis; however, my discussion of discontinuity also includes those films that simply stretch the limits of conventional filmmaking principles; for instance, *Dogville* and could not be classified under Bordwell’s definition, yet they share the quality of using a conspicuous stylistic element.

Other studies on this subject do not contrast significantly; most writers are interested in the extent that a narrative can be partitioned and disarranged. Marsha Kinder’s definition is in some sense in agreement with Edward Branigan’s response to Bordwell. What she calls ‘database narratives’ are

narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language; [they] reveal the arbitrariness of the particular choices made, and the possibility of making other combinations which would create alternative stories. (2002: 6)

Kinder also argues that alternatives of an ordinary narrative are emphasised and made explicit in these new narratives; moreover she draws attention to the way selection and combination are thematized. With a similar argument, Jonathan Eig (2003) writes about the way these films draw attention to their narrative structures, evoke confusion and offer multiple truths. He is interested in exploring the unpleasant surprises and hedonistic games of what he calls 'mindfuck films' and how the characters survive through them. Eig states that 'these movies owe their impact at least as much to the way they are told as to the stories they are telling' (2003), emphasizing the influence of form on content. Likewise Allen Cameron looks at how the puzzling content in these films is delivered through the films' formal structures. His 'modular narratives [are] narratives that foreground the relationship between the temporality of the story and the order of its telling' (2006: 65). One interesting point he makes is how chronologically ordered narratives in general 'conceal the strong element of determinism in their construction, thereby preserving the narrative future as a realm of possibility' whereas rearranged narratives are 'usually flirting to some extent with determinism' (66). Michael Z. Newman also refers to the same point as Cameron. He does not use the word determinism, but he makes his criticism building on this characteristic of complex narratives: 'A narrative that starts out in confusion is most likely to become clearer, less problematic. But a narrative that starts out simple has the opportunity of developing in the direction of intensified interest, of accumulating sophistication' (2006: 104). Elliot Panek, on the other hand, refers to these group of films as 'psychological puzzle films [...] that possess narratives in which the orientation of events in the plot to diegetic reality is not immediately clear, thus

creating doubt in the viewer's mind as to how reliable, knowledgeable, self-conscious and communicative the narration is' (2006: 65). Panek's observation slightly stands out from the others, as he does not include in his definition the temporal disorder that this group of films usually employ. But all the writings reviewed above, however much they discuss unreliable narrators, alternative futures and other narrative puzzles, do not found their analyses on such films' unconventional visual elements.

As explained in the previous section, the kind of films that I look at in this thesis extend beyond those whose narratives are non-linear and which play with the order of storytelling. There are also those that do not necessarily have surprising or disorienting narratives, but manipulate a visual element so much that it has a direct effect on the story. Closely related to what these writers categorise as complex, puzzle, modular and forking-path narratives are those others that, for instance, experiment with the *mise en scène*, transgress genre conventions and present radical shifts in tone. These films, including the first group, can be said to exhibit a kind of discontinuity because they break, replace or disobey certain cinematic conventions. This thesis explores the outcome of that break, rupture or disorder and investigates whether this outcome is always narrative discontinuity.

One of the most expansive collected volumes on this subject is Warren Buckland's *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (2008). In the introduction, Buckland presents a problem regarding the difficulty of grouping his case studies:

The term 'puzzle film' names a mode of filmmaking that cuts across traditional filmmaking practices, all of which are becoming increasingly difficult to define: so-called American 'independent' cinema, the European and international art film, and certain modes of avant-garde filmmaking. Rather than try to redefine these practices, this volume unites them on the basis of their shared storytelling complexity. (6)

The book recognises the ongoing production of the same kind of films around the world and instead of classifying them into a genre, chooses to refer to them as exhibiting ‘complex storytelling’. The initial aspiration behind Buckland’s book seems to have depended on analysing and understanding these films, akin to this thesis; however, some considerable differences also exist. Buckland introduces puzzle films as ‘reject[ing] classical storytelling techniques and replac[ing] them with complex storytelling’ (2008:1). This argument opposes complex to classical storytelling, which is problematic and confusing. Buckland does not explain in what sense he uses the term classical, although he is seemingly taking Bordwell and Thompson’s model. Classical films may also employ complex storytelling techniques as well as having complex stories. Examples are countless, but ones that come to mind immediately are those of Hitchcock, Lang and Ophuls. One of the reasons why I choose to work with the concept of discontinuity is to scrutinise and reduce if not eliminate this confusion. My intention is not to examine these films against a tradition of filmmaking, but to see the two types in conversation and to look for traces of each type in one another, a point further discussed in the following chapters.

*Puzzle Films* mainly makes use of Bordwell’s and Branigan’s earlier works on narrative to analyse these new films. Most of the articles in this book use some version of narratology, to which I did not want to limit myself in this thesis. In this sense, Thomas Elsaesser’s article poses useful definitions and questions which enable me to introduce my own approach. Elsaesser summarises the complexity of dealing with such diverse films, some of which share formal qualities. Instead of calling them,

a genre or a sub-genre, [he thinks] of them as a phenomenon, or maybe – in deference to François Truffaut – a ‘certain tendency’ in contemporary cinema. But if it is a tendency, it does not point in one direction only and if it is a phenomenon, what is it symptomatic of? (2008: 14)

His question reflects similar concerns voiced by the previously mentioned authors about the difficulty of placing these films somewhere. These films ‘transcend not only genre, but also authorial signature and national cinema’ (16). Elsaesser calls them ‘mind-game films’ as they take ‘delight in disorienting or misleading spectators’ (15) and suggests that they address,

epistemological problems (how do we know what we know) and ontological doubts (about other worlds, other minds) that are in the mainstream of the kinds of philosophical inquiry focused on human consciousness, the mind and the brain, multiple realities or possible worlds. (15)

These films are an investigation of how a story world is created and how it is made plausible as well as an inquiry of the cognition processes that lead us to understand and question that story world. The epistemological problems and ontological doubts that Elsaesser refers to find their reflection in the way the filmmakers tell the stories and consequently the films also become an examination of the ontology of the filmic medium. Needless to say, this condition will become more apparent through the in-depth analyses of the case studies.

The primary difference between my approach and the works mentioned so far comes from the way I chose the films in my discussion. My starting point was to investigate those films that were visually conspicuous, which stretched the possibility of a stylistic element to its limit and whose story could not be summarised without mentioning the use of that stylistic element. However, instead of selecting them by directly looking at the way they tricked and deceived the audience by using unexpected and unconventional techniques, I focused on the visibility of style in these films and the impact it has on story and effect. My interest is firstly in the ways in which the stylistic choices in these films contribute not only to story comprehension, but also to mood, feeling, theme and tone. Therefore, my category of films includes some of these mind-game or puzzle films but is not limited to them. Moreover, I find

it more appropriate to analyse these films along with non-contemporary ones in an attempt to see how they compare and contrast with one another. The storyline of *Dogville*, for example, is not confusing, but the abstract sets can be digressive; similarly *Caché* has an order that can easily be followed except that it withholds some precious information from us. Elsaesser's list of topics that these films address is, therefore, not my concern at the start, but a conclusion I may come to. I believe style in my selection of films facilitates something more than story comprehension. In some examples story depends on a certain style.<sup>5</sup>

The articles in Buckland's book together with the other writings mentioned above have led me to think about how to define some of the most widely used terms in this thesis. Some writers separate narrative and narration to explain the effects and functions of the films. According to Buckland, for instance, 'the complexity of puzzle films operates on two levels: narrative and narration. It emphasises the complex *telling* (plot, narration) of a simple or complex *story* (narrative)' (6). This clear-cut separation generates difficulties when discontinuity is applied as a critical term; narrative and narration do not function well separately and their meanings intermingle. In theory, we know that narrative and narration are distinct; we can distinguish and identify them with words. However, we cannot draw their boundaries precisely when it comes to analysing what is on screen. Any study of narrative, for example, in a film that is told in non-linear timeline, such as *Memento*, will inevitably refer to its narration and, more often than not, the characteristics of the narrative will be borrowed from its narration. It is useful to think of these two terms as two parts of the same thing; narrative is a story told and narration is its telling. In other words, any story includes and is completed with both, but their distinction is not visually clear. This distinction is something that will be explored more in the next chapter, the facets

of which will be expanded by the discussion of other terms such as story, style and continuity.

Buckland and most other writers take storytelling as the main concern in their analyses. They argue that it is the narration that keeps some information back about the characters and incidents, and create gaps in the viewer's knowledge; this withheld information is then either surprisingly revealed or discovered by the viewer.

Departing from this perspective, I do not assign the complexity in these films only to storytelling; they are also visually interesting, calling attention to the ways in which the shots and scenes are framed, photographed and cut. The puzzles, mind-games, forking-paths and databases are not words particular to the stories describing suspense, confusion and complexity, but they are also visual results of filmmaking decisions apparent on the screen. Unreliable narrators and inconsistent incidents in these films are produced through their unusual editing and cinematography. Shifts in subjectivity and tone, breaks in the viewer's causal, spatial and temporal orientation with the story and conspicuous – perhaps excess – visual characteristics can all be discussed by applying the term discontinuity. Although all of the studies mentioned above are about films in which we see one of these cases, none fully engages itself with this term. The following chapters will test what a study of discontinuity can introduce to our understanding of films through case analyses.

### **Exploring discontinuity in cinema**

As mentioned in the opening, the idea behind this research project stems from an observation of the recent increase in the number of films that make rather unusual stylistic choices: a disorder in storytelling, unsteady and unreliable narration, obscure and excessive scenes, repeating dialogue in separate sequences, extreme long takes,

extreme close-ups or extremely short shots, a blurriness between fiction and non-fiction or subjective and objective points of view, or simply an overdose or a lack of colour, sound or lighting.<sup>6</sup> Films that employ these noticeable characteristics do not only exemplify the recent trend in mainstream cinema that makes use of spectacular effects and unique visual experiments. Some of them are less technology-dependent and they are some of the most appreciated contemporary examples of art cinema.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned before, belonging to different genres, tackling distinct subjects and varying in form and purpose, the single and most prominent characteristic that these films share is discontinuity. Therefore, my primary objective in this research is to identify and describe the key aspects and functions of discontinuity in cinema through analyses of these contemporary examples. These analyses form the bulk of this thesis, yet it is important to underline that discontinuity is not solely restricted to them. It is not a new phenomenon that these stylistic choices are made in films; there are many examples in the history of cinema that make use of discontinuity in different ways. Thus, the following chapters also include some discussions of well-known older films to accompany the contemporary counterparts. The film analyses do not rely too heavily on the categorization of films as classical, modernist or post-modernist, though the case studies can seemingly fit into such groups. The primary objective is to reach a better understanding of discontinuity, which naturally leads to an outlook of this concept in terms of different contexts and periods. Some of the main questions that direct this research are as follows. In what new ways do contemporary films engage with their stories compared to the past? Is there a difference in the use of discontinuity on the visual or narrative level? What are the effects and functions of discontinuity in cinema? Can we exemplify and describe some cases? Does discontinuity have an impact on our following the film? Does this impact pose a



disturbance of the film's coherence? Do conventions and expectations influence the way discontinuity is perceived and defined in cinema? Before starting to find answers for these questions, it is appropriate first to delineate a definition for the term. The case studies in the following chapters will be tools for conceptualising and discussing what discontinuity is and accounting for its effects and functions. The thesis, therefore, is not composed of purely formalist films analyses; it aims to present an evaluation of the term discontinuity and the critical possibilities it contributes to the interpretation of these films.

The use of the term discontinuity, hence, is twofold: it describes a certain stylistic quality in films and it develops it into a topic in film criticism. Adding to the list of categorical names given by the writers above, such as puzzle films, database narratives and mind-game films, I would like to call the films in focus here discontinuity films.<sup>8</sup> Although I agree with the fact that most of these films are puzzling, I am more interested in the way these films produce such effects. The aim is to scrutinise various examples of discontinuity in order to discover its different types and purposes. In this sense, the approach of this thesis is similar to those studies that discuss a narrative mode or a theme in cinema. If the term discontinuity seems abstract, it is nonetheless readily observable in these films' breach of narrative linearity, disruption of the reality of the diegetic world or confounding of our expectations in the composition of frames, scenes or sequences. Beyond these films' conspicuous and unusual look, there is usually an emphasis on or a recurrence of a single specific stylistic choice to the extent that it becomes a character, a theme or something else that develops and steers the narrative. Consequently, the same stylistic element may have patterns or designs for us to follow, which usually progress in a like manner to the narratives. The unconventionality is pertinent to this stylistic

element; however, the consistency and repetition in its usage partially normalise this unconventionality. In other words, although these films initially look unusual due to a stylistic feature, incrementally this particular feature becomes a natural and steady part of them. Once its parameters are established and made familiar for us, they are rarely broken or replaced. The irregularity in style does not remain enigmatic, but instead turns into a structuring aspect. Discontinuity films emphasise the contribution of style in a film's story: style no longer functions as the means of a story's construction, but is indistinguishable from it. As a result, we frequently feel the need to mention *how* a film tells its story in order to explain *what* it is telling. Thus, two obvious functions of discontinuity as a critical concept are to offer a different perspective on the relationship between style and content, and to question the overlaps in their definitions.

As mentioned above, discontinuity is not exclusive to contemporary films; there are many examples in the past that exhibit similar ruptures in time, space and causality, whether throughout the whole duration of the film or only in certain scenes. However, it is only recently that we have started to witness the popularity of such uses and largely in mainstream cinema. This is why the contemporary case studies in this thesis are more detailed; the research starts out with an interest in this context and firstly attempts to discover the functions of discontinuity in today's cinema and reflects on the past. The range of contemporary films cover approximately the past two decades of narrative cinema; I take 1994 roughly as the starting year.<sup>9</sup> In his book, *In the Blink of an Eye*, Walter Murch marks 1995 as 'the last time the number of films edited mechanically equaled the number of films edited digitally' (2001: xi) and says that 'at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the situation is reversed: Almost all films are being edited electronically, on computers' (2001: 77). However,

although the change in the function and frequency of new technologies seems to overlap with the spread of discontinuity films, the thesis will not look directly at this relationship. Nevertheless, digital technologies have partially acted as a catalyst that brought this unconventional style to our attention and prompted us to look back at the history of cinema.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, non-narrative and non-fiction films, such as avant-garde works, artists' films and documentaries, have been largely left out, as this is a project that explores fictional narratives.<sup>11</sup> There is a diversity of films from different geographies, filmmakers or production modes that can be discussed here; however, due to limited space, some of the most praised and well-known examples of contemporary filmmaking are selected as case studies. Considering also the developing literature on these kinds of films, those examples that are popular among contemporary critics are chosen in order to continue building the discussion that this body of work has initiated.

One difficulty of writing about contemporary works is that the subject in question is happening at this moment, constantly changing. Categorising a current occurrence will always be incomplete; studies are still in progress and the literature on the subject is still in development. Indeed, when a number of films start to show similar tendencies, an immediate question that comes to mind is related to the common reasons behind it: *why* is the use of such obvious, unusual and alternative stylistic choices more popular? The spectrum of these reasons includes technological, cultural and even social changes. Attending to each of them is perhaps an impossible task and certainly is not viable in this thesis given the time and space restrictions. My intention is rather to look at *what* the shared characteristics of these films are through my case studies and *how* their functions have shifted through an overview and a

comparison of past and present. Such a study will not give us definite answers as to *why* the number of discontinuity films have arisen in the past decade and why they have become more mainstream; however, it will form an initial basis for discussion and provide hints that can direct us towards possible answers. An overview of past and present requires analyses and comparisons of films from various eras in order to inspect comprehensively the changing definitions of discontinuity. Studying this development, we can form an account of discontinuity in film history that pinpoints some of the major examples that make use of an unusual style. The contemporary cases of this thesis will be accompanied by analyses of past examples in order to be able to delineate the nature and functions of discontinuity.

Whether the varied stylistic choices in the selected films break our engagement with the story by juxtaposing fiction and non-fiction or introduce an aberrant style of storytelling by using temporal tricks, the aim of the thesis is to identify and evaluate them against past examples, which will allow us to outline simultaneously what discontinuity in cinema is, what its significance was in the past and what it has become in the present. These analyses will in turn enable us to rethink the relationship between film style and narrative. In general, therefore, this thesis explores discontinuity as a stylistic device and as a critical concept. Throughout the thesis, examples from the history of cinema are brought up and compared with and contrasted to contemporary ones in order to present the changing functions and significances of discontinuity. In doing so, discontinuity is tested as an instrument for evaluating, criticising and understanding movies. One of the ways in which this thesis departs from the studies discussed above is the priority it gives to visual style. Instead of looking at this group of films solely from a narratological perspective, it also emphasises the significance of visual style and treats it as one of a film's key

subjects. Moreover, instead of classifying these films as an independent and new phenomenon, it traces similar examples in the history of cinema. Discontinuity is rarely used as a critical concept in cinema studies. By scrutinising this term, the thesis also deals with larger questions in relation to what cinema is. Moreover, as mentioned above, the thesis attempts to uncover the changing functions of discontinuity as a stylistic device, especially focusing on how it is used in contemporary cinema.

It should be noted that I do not aim to coin a category or a genre in this thesis but to offer an evaluation of continuing developments and point to their importance. Close analysis and interpretation of these new works of art will hopefully produce new views about how discontinuity functions in the construction of a film narrative, about what the complicated relationship between photography, time and narrative is and finally about how we define the medium of film. My method in this thesis, therefore, is criticism and interpretation, without which we would not be able to discuss value, meaning or effect in films. As Clement Greenberg writes, ‘If reliable ways of proving aesthetic judgement were actually found [...] we’d be able to experience all the art that has ever been made simply by reading or hearing reports’ (Greenberg 1999: 14). Aesthetic judgement is inevitably personal; it does not pursue a scientific process. It is only through criticism and interpretation that we can uncover why certain instances in films have an effect on us and what sort of meanings they offer, both in terms of their narratives and in terms of cinematic possibilities.

Charles Warren’s three traits of criticism summarises this condition:

A desire to discern the rules by which things work, along with an openness to surprise, a willingness to reformulate the rules; a desire to testify to the power one has experienced in works of art, to point and gesture and speculate so as to help others to open themselves to what art can do and can show or reveal; a concern more to start a process of thought and reaction than to deliver a fixed truth. (2007: 23)

The crucial word here is ‘to reveal’ as the critic has to look for the effects of what is on the screen by looking at the screen. As Perkins states

A useful theory will have to redirect attention to the movie as it is *seen*, by shifting the emphasis back from creation to perception. In order to arrive at a more accurate and inclusive definition of film as it exists for the spectator, it will need to concentrate not on the viewfinder and the cutting bench but on the screen. (1976: 27)

In studying cinema, I greatly value personal responses, what we experience when we see a film. I take my analyses and interpretations in this thesis to be my arguments, which are not definitive results but questioning processes by which I explore my subject. In Stanley Cavell’s words:

A reading, like any recitation, is by all means to be checked for its accuracy. It should also be thought of as an argument, something requiring a response [...] Giving significance to and placing significance in specific possibilities and necessities of the physical medium of film are the fundamental acts of, respectively, the director of a film and the critic (or audience) of film; together with the idea of what constitutes an ‘element’ of the medium of film is not knowable prior to these discoveries of direction and of criticism. This reciprocity between element and significance I would like to call the cinematic circle. Exploring this circle is something that can be thought of as exploring the medium of film. (1979: xiii-xiv)

## **Chapter Outlines**

The thesis is divided into five chapters, three of which are devoted to detailed case studies. The first chapter ‘Terms and Definitions’ introduces and explains some of the main terms that are used extensively throughout the research, such as style, narrative, narration, continuity and discontinuity. In that sense, as in the introduction, it proceeds with a review of how these terms have been used and defined in some studies especially those that I employ to build my own definitions on. This chapter does not include any case studies but makes references to examples in order to clarify the definitions of the terms. Moreover, it presents the reasons for choosing these terms instead of their alternatives. Some of the questions that this chapter engages

with are as follows: How do style and content overlap? Can these two terms be defined separately, in complete isolation from one another? If they can, can we exemplify this separation on screen? What is the link between narrative and continuity? Are all narratives continuous? What is the common definition for continuity in film studies? Can we define discontinuity building upon that definition? As expected, most of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of continuity and discontinuity, in which these terms are identified through some of the fundamental characteristics of the cinematic medium. The chapter introduces the close link between the terms narrative and continuity based on Genette's and Perez's writings and seeks a direction to discuss discontinuity in a seemingly continuous form. Moreover, it presents a review of Barthes's and Bazin's ideas on photography and links them to the relationship between photography and continuity. Finally, before leading to questions regarding discontinuity, it discusses the differences between the functions of this term and Bordwell's parametric narration and art-cinema narration. The chapter arrives at the definition of discontinuity by placing it against its counterpart and draws to a close by introducing some of the main research questions: What is the definition of discontinuity as a stylistic device and as a critical concept? If continuity as a device produces a continuity effect, does discontinuity as a device function the same way? What are some examples of discontinuity in films? How useful is discontinuity as a critical concept in film interpretation and criticism?

The following three chapters aim to answer these questions through in-depth film analyses. These chapters are named according to different forms and functions that discontinuity can produce: 'Non-linear Narratives', 'Telling Stories with Absences' and 'Upsetting Narrations'. As will be evident in the chapters, these categories are not exclusively distinct; they may overlap and some examples can be

included in all three of them. Therefore, this separation is only for practical reasons and allows us to understand discontinuity better. Chapter Two, 'Non-linear Narratives', covers those examples that manipulate the temporal order of the stories, which is usually done through a film's editing. Discontinuity in these films mostly manifests itself as interrupting the unity of time, consequently affecting spatiality and causality. This chapter aims to uncover the functions of such a stylistic use through the analyses of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961), *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, in which narrational modes represent how the films' protagonists experience life. Therefore, these films also exemplify how discontinuity further complicates the separation of film style and content. To introduce non-linearity, the chapter firstly engages with one of the most well-known examples, *Marienbad*, and examines the effects of non-linearity using detailed examples from scenes. Then it moves on to contemporary examples in which we find similar uses of non-linearity and contrasts them against this earlier example.

The third chapter 'Telling Stories with Absences' looks at those examples in which absence becomes a tool to construct the narratives. This chapter explores the concept of absence as a form of discontinuity and introduces its function in cinema. *L'Eclisse*, *Persona* and *Caché* are the main case studies in this chapter. In all three films absence is utilised in different ways in order to emphasise and develop the narratives. Absence creates breaks and interruptions, but at the same time it supports the stories. The fourth chapter, 'Upsetting Narrations', focuses on those films that upset genre conventions, swing between different points of view and manipulate expectations. These include films that fluctuate between fiction and non-fiction or that usually have scenes without clear indications whether they belong to dream, memory, hallucination, past or present. They shift from one reality to the other re-



establishing the causal, spatial and temporal elements in the stories and forcing us to review the characters and incidents from a different perspective. *Dogville* and *Manderlay* are the two films on which this chapter largely focuses; the unconventional uses of the abstract sets in these two films are analysed in order to discover the functions they have beyond representing the settings for the films. However, the chapter starts out with a variety of examples including *Viaggio in Italia* and *Une femme est une femme*, both of which fluctuate between fiction and documentary, causing the film to shift perspectives. *Tirez sur la pianiste* and *Johnny Guitar* are then studied to introduce and examine genre-hopping in films. *Psycho* and *Eraserhead* are also among the examples that upset our expectations and appear to cause discontinuity.

All types of discontinuity covered in these three chapters raise fundamental questions related to filmmaking and storytelling, which are fully engaged with through the films' analyses. The final chapter, 'Other Cases of Discontinuity', is a supplementary chapter that makes brief references to a variety of examples from different periods, filmmakers and genres in an attempt to expand and clarify the idea of discontinuity and its functions. It looks at cases that other chapters seemingly exclude such as avant-garde filmmaking and its influences on mainstream cinema as well as numerous films that are continuous as a whole, but contain a discontinuous scene or a sequence. Thus, this chapter especially tests how discontinuity can be used as a critical concept in film criticism and what it contributes to our interpretations of films when applied to seemingly continuous films.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, I refer to those films in which discontinuity is intentional and is not a result of poor filmmaking. This intentionality is evident in the way they are made visible.

<sup>2</sup> This increase is a popular subject in newspapers' film sections and film blogs. See Farber (2005), Emerson (2005) and Scott and Dargis (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Bordwell refers to the emergent category of 'puzzle films' and defines them as follows: 'The story world is presented as consistent and objectively existing, but there are gaps in our knowledge about it. The narration withholds information, often not signalling that it's doing so' (2006: 80).

<sup>4</sup> In Borges's 'The Garden of Forking Paths', the character 'has devised a labyrinthine novel' in which one can choose simultaneously 'an infinite array of possible worlds' (Bordwell 2002a: 88).

<sup>5</sup> Routledge's 'Philosophers on Film' series include edited volumes on *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine*, two of my main case studies. The complexity of these two films attracts film scholars as well as those working on philosophy and aesthetics. See Grau (2009) and Kania (2009).

<sup>6</sup> 'As puzzle films, time-scrambling plots, and network narratives draw us into a game of story comprehension, the style asks us to become connoisseurs of pictorial contrivance' (Bordwell 2006: 179).

<sup>7</sup> I use 'mainstream' and 'art' cinema only to make a distinction between their production modes. Aesthetically, I believe, these two groups should be evaluated together.

<sup>8</sup> I do not call these films 'discontinuous' because what I aim to test is whether they produce such an effect. These are films in which we can spot an element of discontinuity easily and analyse by using this concept.

<sup>9</sup> Non-linear timelines are common in contemporary films. The list of films on IMDb under this keyword category ([http://www.imdb.com/keyword/nonlinear-timeline/?title\\_type=feature](http://www.imdb.com/keyword/nonlinear-timeline/?title_type=feature)) gives a rough estimate of when they became more popular. Although the database is not entirely accurate and complete, it is evident that around 400 films out of 547 have been produced after 1995 [accessed on 15.07.2011]. *Pulp Fiction* is the second most popular among these films according to the ratings on IMDb and it was produced in 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Two well-known scholars that write about digital technology, Sean Cubitt and Lev Manovich, both look at the history of cinema with the knowledge and perspective of the digital era and use this hindsight as a method to explore the past as well as the present and future. See Cubitt (2005) and Manovich (2001).

<sup>11</sup> There is only a small section discussing discontinuity and avant-garde films in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter One**

### **TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

The discussion of discontinuity necessitates the use of some familiar terms such as style, narrative, narration and continuity. Consequently, providing clear explanations of my use of each of them is essential. Moreover, each term has acquired a heavy baggage of miscellaneous meanings and connotations throughout time and they have been the subjects of countless works in film and literary studies. This chapter explains how each of these terms is understood and used in this thesis; however, the usage will become more refined as the terms recur throughout the case studies in the coming chapters. One of the complications of defining these terms comes from the multiple associations ascribed to them by their overuse. The definition of narrative, for instance, is adapted from literary theories and it is widely used in film studies as well as a range of social sciences, including anthropology and history. To avoid confusion, only those definitions that help to explain and clarify the coming discussions are provided and most of the nuanced differentials between uses are not reviewed here due to restrictions of space. Another complication about these terms is that they are indeterminate and without strict boundaries: one definition may overlap with or depend on the other, some of them may be taken synonymously and it is difficult to exemplify them through reference to examples on-screen. For instance, story and narrative are often used alternately, obscuring distinctions between them, which for some writers do not exist. A further complexity arises when one attempts to define narration, the elements of which are not immediately evident in films. Given these complications, my intention in this chapter is not to propose an alternative to narrative theories, but rather to explain my definitions for these terms

with supporting examples so that the discussion of discontinuity in the following chapters may be more easily followed.

## Style

In discussions of films and cinema, the term style can be used to refer to a number of things. It can indicate all the outcomes of the means of production used in establishing and maintaining scenes, from framing and editing to lights and props. Alternatively, it can signify specific characteristics embraced by a director or evident in a genre. Jump cuts in Godard's films or high-contrast cinematography in *films noir*, for example, are sometimes regarded as stylistic traits. Moreover, defining film style is not merely restricted to visual elements; what we see on the screen comprises the story as well. Therefore, it can also include the contents of scenes, structures of dialogue and actions. In this sense, the definition of film style is quite broad and it takes both narrative and narration into account. Style, therefore, is literally those qualities ascribed to a film's content, but in some cases these qualities can even become content itself. The obvious stylistic choices in the films that this thesis explores are sometimes as substantial as the stories that they deal with. These films especially call attention to the ambiguous relationship between these two words, style and content, since all these films defy in one way or other what most would call conventions of classical film narrative and narration. Thinking about other arts here will allow us to observe this ambiguity better. It is impossible to distinguish, for instance, style from content, in those arts that are not predominantly based on narrative: music, architecture, painting. However, in arts that are relatively dominated by the communication of a story, such as literature and cinema, attempts to list the concrete elements belonging solely to style or to content tend to be flawed. Story is

seemingly the content in these arts and it is the primary thing that is delivered; nevertheless, a story is always told through a chosen style, which makes it futile to separate the two. Cinema's particular way of obscuring the distinction between style and content is determined by the mechanical functions of the camera, whose lenses unavoidably record whatever is in front of them. A filmed story, therefore, is always delivered through some kind of copying of reality. Generally, all means of filmmaking, such as editing, lighting or props, serve the story and the world captured through the camera. What happens, for instance, in the famous shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)? How much of it belongs to the story and how much to the style? Is the fragmented editing in the opening scene of *Magnificent Andersons* (Orson Welles, 1942) a stylistic element or does it provide a background for the story? Is the rolling of an aerosol can on the street or is the long take that shows it part of the content in *Close-Up* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990)? These questions may be beneficial to film analyses, but they raise doubts about the necessity of such a separation between the two words. That is to say, the questions above could be helpful when analysing the effects and meanings that certain scenes evoke, but the answers would not be univocal. In short, though a theoretical distinction between style and content is significant for criticism, it is doubtful whether conceiving of style and content as opposites or as mutually exclusive is essential.

Writing about literary critics' consensus on the rejection of 'the old antithesis between style and content', Susan Sontag explains, 'Everyone is quick to avow that style and content are indissoluble, that the strongly individual style of each important writer is an organic aspect of his work and never something merely "decorative"' (1986: 15). She then follows this by describing the complexities and contradictions involved when attempting to use the words distinctly:

In fact, to talk about the style of a particular novel or poem at all as a 'style', without implying, whether one wishes to or not, that style is merely decorative, accessory, is extremely hard. Merely by employing the notion, one is almost bound to invoke, albeit implicitly, an antithesis between style and something else. (16)

Although dictionary definitions for style and content are precisely distinct, in practice such a precision cannot be attained, especially in the films of this thesis where style is highlighted.<sup>1</sup> Going back to the question about *Psycho* posed in the previous paragraph, I would argue that the content of Hitchcock's shower scene includes the well-crafted editing as much as Marion's killing. Style not only creates the effect but the actual killing; the editing in this scene is one of its most noticeable parts; in effect, the editing 'describes' the murder, as sentences in a novel describe a literary death. In practice, therefore, it is difficult to trace the boundaries of style and content. To be able to show the overlapping and interdependent yet indistinguishable elements of these terms, one has to start by separating them. However, this method is paradoxical: this is a contrived distinction that will eradicate itself as soon as their commonalities become too many to make them separable. In other words, beginning to define both terms on their own will only lead one to cross both terms' boundaries. This is the reason why I will adopt a forged distinction between these two terms, a distinction that many writers use, to show how they cannot be separated. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye refer to this problem: 'Style, [...] seems to refer to the "how", rather than the "what", although this formulation can seem to imply a separation that becomes unsustainable when we examine individual works' (2005: 9). Indeed, the distinction between style and content works better when we talk more generally about films. For instance, one can argue that Kiarostami uses a documentary-like cinematography and *mise en scène* in *Close-Up* with long-takes and real people as actors. However, at the level of close analysis of individual scenes, such elements of style are inevitably counted also as part of the film's content. Based on a true story,

with actual people acting out the incidents they personally experienced, this is a fiction that includes documentary. The aerosol can in the afore-mentioned scene has no significance as an object in the story except that its rolling emphasises the impatient waiting of the driver who, for that matter, also has not much significance. All the main actors are inside a house, the protagonist is being arrested, but Kiarostami prefers to leave us outside with the driver. This is a scene in which the camera turns to a trivial moment and emphasises the duration of its stay there. The camera is not restricted to filming its protagonist; it is free to wander off, giving signs about its control over the telling of a real story. In *Close-Up*, Kiarostami's style is in fact what he films: the documenting of a story already past and of a performance in which the actor re-plays a role he has played in real life.

As explained above, this thesis roughly uses the dictionary definition of the term style. However, there are certain cases in which this definition can come to mean more than what it is. Style refers to 'the features of [...] composition which belong to form and expression'; 'the manner in which a work of art is executed' and 'one of the modes recognised in a particular art as suitable for the production of beautiful or skilful work' (*OED*).<sup>2</sup> One may wonder why the word style is chosen instead of form and ask whether the two words can be used alternately. The answer lies in the lack of specificity that the word form has, which makes it unfitting to discuss the aesthetic value of works of art; everything has to have form but style can only be attributed to some. The word form connotes shape and structure, but style suggests intention, meaning and value. Perhaps the phrase 'beautiful or skilful work' in the last dictionary definition above can explain this concern. As Stanley Cavell points out, 'nothing is a "possibility of a medium" unless its use gives it significance. And "the" significance of a possibility is as worth looking for as "the" meaning of a

word' (1979: 133). The reason we attend to a stylistic usage is because of its contribution to a film's value and meaning. Style deserves analysis, either technologically, socially, culturally or ideologically, because of the way it challenges and transforms artistic codes and conventions of filmmaking. By style, therefore, I refer to a group of consistent and visible artistic elements repeatedly or distinctively found in a film. To return to Gibbs and Pye once again, the words 'systematic and significant' are essential and they 'imply the purposive and patterned nature of the decisions considered as "style"' (2005: 9). The systematic usage of stylistic elements in a film gives it significance; meaning in film is only complete by these choices. Therefore, 'style is more than an accumulation of material decisions, it is a web, a network, a texture, a pattern, or, more mechanistically, a system' (2005: 11). This definition is important in the sense that style is not merely any outcome of certain technical possibilities and uses; it refers to a well-thought out arrangement of those filmmaking possibilities within a film, which turn into cohering expressions and meanings in that film.

Some films demand close readings and interpretations in order for their complex organisation of stylistic elements to be recognised. V. F. Perkins explains how subtlety and complexity may be found,

in an organization of details whose relationships simultaneously complicate and clarify the movie's viewpoint. At this level of coherence significance is locked into the picture's form. We are taken beyond the realm of the language substitute which provides an *illustration* [italics in original] of messages, opinions and themes. The separately discernible meanings become important less for their independent value than for their contributions, mutually deepening and defining, to a total vision. What we see here is, primarily, a way of seeing; the direct registration and embodiment, in a 'secondary world', of a point of view. (1976: 119-120)

Perkins argues that a film's form reveals a way of seeing. In other words, form provides signposts to an understanding of the filmic world. Perkins makes a similar argument in a later essay and writes that the films of Ophuls, Ray and Sirk



demonstrate that ‘the director can bind the movie together in a design that offers a more personal and detailed conception of the story’s significance, embodying an experience of the world and a viewpoint both considered and felt’ (1982: 213). These are films in which ‘manner becomes style’ (213). Likewise, this thesis takes style not only as a means that delivers the story, but also as something that exposes its significance.

Most of the examples in this thesis make use of advanced filmmaking technologies, which may bring to mind how significant these technologies are in terms of style. In film studies, style has often been used in conjunction with the word technology. Research into this relationship has mainly concentrated on illustrating and verifying the different applications of the same technology and their corresponding results on the screen.<sup>3</sup> The definition of style in most of these studies roughly originates from the accumulation of these results. This is also due to the fact that they start out primarily with an interest in technology rather than an interest in the films’ aesthetic values. In other words, a development in technology, such as the introduction of deep-focus cinematography, is what they explore. Accordingly, these studies tend to examine those films in which they find evidence of such a development.<sup>4</sup> These are some of the reasons why these approaches would not be useful for this thesis. The interest of this thesis principally lies in individual films in which similar stylistic tendencies can be noticed. However, as explained above, the meaning intended by the use of the word style is not the result of an application, but the consequence of a harmonious and intentional organisation of elements within films, which contributes to their overall significance. Close analysis of films can pinpoint those stylistic elements that make us experience these films in a certain way. The discussion of technology gains significance only after we start the analytical

process and only if we decide that the technology permits those elements to be realised. The intention of this thesis, therefore, is to explore style and possibly, but not necessarily, arrive at an analysis of technology afterwards. As Gombrich observes, ‘unlike scientists, [...] we humanists have been less fortunate and that for the obvious reason that the events we try to explain tend to be immensely complex and can never be reduced to one easily formulated law, which we may describe as the cause of the event’ (1991: 62). Understanding new technologies is not the aim of this thesis; rather, it is a desire to understand and account for particular effects. As Cavell proposes, and I strongly agree, the value of films will be ‘discovered in [our] own experience’ and ‘we remain in the process of knowing them and knowing our experience of them – forever left guessing the unseen’ (Quoted in Klevan 2005: 119).

I come to this understanding of style owing much debt to the work of V.F. Perkins, especially to the chapter ‘How is What’ in his book *Film as Film*.<sup>5</sup> Style in a film is the primary means of storytelling and it is not merely a decorative factor that supplements the narrative, but a substantial one that complements it. As Perkins writes,

The great film approaches an intensity of cohesion such that its elements do not operate solely to maintain or further the reality of the fictional world, nor solely to decorative, affective or rhetorical effect (1976: 131).  
At the level of detail we can value most the moments when narrative, concept and emotion are most completely fused (133).

In other words, style integrates with content so much so that it cannot be studied separately and independently; the totality of content and style makes up the work of art. This condition inevitably brings forward the question of how we define content. Broadly speaking, content is a film’s subject matter, or in a narrative film, its story. Needless to say, in every narrative film, there is a story told, a narrative, and a way that this is told, a narration. Consequently, it is necessary to delineate this twofold characteristic of a film’s content because it will be useful in the analyses of the kind

of films on which this thesis focuses. These are films in which we pay attention to how a story is told in order to understand what the story is. Accordingly, the narration is conspicuous and irregular compared to widespread filmmaking conventions.

Narrative and narration, then, are two parts that make up a story. They complement one another: any narrative is narrated and any narration produces a narrative. The difference between these two terms is also somewhat similar to that between what and how, evoking the terms content and style. The two pairs of words can approximate one another and these overlaps can be confusing. The difference stems from the fact that content *consists of* narrative and narration whereas style is used to *denote* the form of these things. Perhaps it is less complicated to make a distinction between content and narrative, as the former is a more general term while the latter refers to the story. Style and narration, on the other hand, both describe the way something is communicated. If we return to the shower scene in *Psycho*, the most obvious stylistic element – the well-crafted editing – of that scene produces the offensiveness in its narration; it is the editing which helps evoke the terror and violence that Marion experiences. Roughly, style comprises the technical, visual and textual elements whereas narration refers to the telling of just the film's story. A more detailed look at these terms will clarify matters.

### **Narrative and Narration**

Narrative is yet another word that has been studied and defined in multiple ways, the consequence of which is an inherent ambiguity in its usage. One can simply use narrative as a synonym for story. However, this is something that I wish to avoid in this thesis because there is a slight yet viable distinction between the two

words. Gérard Genette's well-known work *Narrative Discourse* is useful as a starting place for trying to understand and define this distinction between story and narrative. Genette's concern is with written text not films, but the clear outline he draws for these concepts can function for film, to an extent at least. Genette draws attention to the three meanings that the word narrative embodies and distinguishes them by employing different words for each. He uses 'the word story for the signified narrative content, [...] the word narrative for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and [...] the word narrating for the producing narrative action' (1981: 27). He then continues by explaining their mutually entwined nature:

Story and narrating [...] exist for me only by means of the intermediary of the narrative. But reciprocally the narrative (the narrated discourse) can only be such to the extent that it tells a story, without which it would not be narrative, and to the extent that it is uttered by someone, without which it would not itself be a discourse. As narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it. (29)

Tom Gunning's discussion of narrative clarifies these points further; he also takes Genette's distinction as his primary reference point but applies it to film. His definitions are relatively close to my own approach:

Narrative discourse is [...] the actual arrangement of signifiers that communicate the story – words in literature, moving images and written titles in silent films. It is only through the means of expression that we come in contact with either story or the act of narrating. The story is an imaginary construction that the spectator or reader creates while reading the narrative discourse of the actual text. (1999a: 462)

Moreover, Gunning highlights an essential difference between literature and film, which is the latter's photographic nature. He proposes a fourth aspect to Genette's discussion, narrativization, and he explains that this concept 'focuses the transformation of showing into telling, film's bending of its excessive realism to narrative purposes' (1999a: 465). Gunning's concern with the relationship between photographic realism and the construction of a fictional story is understandable;

nonetheless, it is not clear how one can distinguish between telling and showing in a film. He reformulates Genette's theory only by reproducing an opposition between showing and telling that is central to literature. This is where narrative theories derived from literary criticism cease to offer grounds for discussion. The photographic nature of the medium becomes problematic and unaccountable when it is ignored or restricted in the terminology of narrative theory. Cameras cannot avoid recording or documenting; therefore, telling involves showing. You cannot describe a chair, for instance, without showing how it is like, what it is made of and where it is, at least to a certain extent. Films show details, due to the medium of camera, even though the filmmaker may not want to specifically 'tell' these details. Alternatively, because the cinema is a time-based medium, showing also involves telling. Shots will inevitably run in a sequence that will form a narration, whether meaningful or not. Even if there is a long take, of the chair, for instance, it will show that chair in time.

Gilberto Perez also draws attention to the fact that the words narrative and narration are not in opposition to one another in cinema.<sup>6</sup> He argues that one can become a function of the other. As an example, Perez uses a sequence from *Moana* (Robert Flaherty, 1926), in which a boy climbs a coconut tree. Flaherty chooses to shoot the boy's climb in three parts: the camera first shows the bottom part of the tree until the boy disappears from the screen above; then the camera tilts up to follow the boy's climb in the same way; and lastly, the top of the tree is revealed by the camera where the boy ends his climb. Perez argues that 'the telling in this sequence is a way of showing' (2000: 54). Flaherty moves the camera up twice, directing us to look at not only the climb, but also the size of the tree. Every time the camera moves up, we wonder how much more is left until the top. If we return to Gunning's term, narrativization, we should acknowledge that it not only concerns 'the transformation

of showing into telling, the bending of [cinema's] excessive realism', but also the transformation of telling into showing, which can be achieved by directing the point of view or manipulating film's temporality. Therefore, narrativization should include the visualisation of perception and of temporality that are necessary for filmed stories. Whatever the case may be, the term narrativization is especially useful in drawing attention to the notion of transformation, the making of something into something else, which always requires a form. The way things exist and happen in life is too complicated and too great in detail; a momentary incident may take a large amount of time to recount. A story needs to be narrativized; some type of arrangement has to be given to it. This, therefore, is a primary definition of narrative. Borrowing from Gilberto Perez, I define film narrative as simply 'a story told'. As Perez writes: 'A narrative is not just a story, something that happened or is imagined to have happened, but a story told: not a sequence that happened but a sequence made' (2000: 51). By the term narrative, therefore, I refer to all pieces of information delivered about the story during the film and not to any other versions of the same story constructed by the filmmaker before the film was realised or to versions imagined by the spectators after seeing it. Narrative is exclusive to all that there is in the film; it is not the same with the story, which can change considerably from one person to the other, and one medium to another. The story that the filmmaker visualises may not be the same as the narrative, which, furthermore, may not match the story that each of us makes of the film. Narrative is what is conveyed in a film in a specific way; a different telling of the same story will produce a different narrative. A story, on the other hand, is larger; it is what the filmmaker sets out to tell and what we deduce from the narrative even though the two may not perfectly be the same.

It is useful here to introduce some significant characteristics of film narrative, which are relevant for the discussions of discontinuity in the coming chapters. As briefly mentioned above, storytelling in cinema differs from other narrative and dramatic arts because of the medium's dependence on photography. Time is an inherent element in cinema and it creates another fundamental conflict for narrative construction. Film time is inevitably linear because of projection; however, narratives do not always require a linear representation of time. We tend to call a film non-linear whenever we see a disorder in the telling of a story, but that disorder in fact may have an effect on the linear construction of that story and consequently its meaning. In other words, non-linear presentation of events in a narrative may influence and change what we make of the story. The duration of that presentation, that is, a film's projection, eventually becomes significant in comprehending the function of this non-linearity. Alain Renoir makes a distinction between the receiving and understanding of a narrative and the receiving and understanding of a painting, which can advance this discussion. The distinction is based on the necessary time required to engage with the works. He argues that 'the corollary of this difference is that the student of literature tends to apprehend the whole only after seeing the details, whereas the student of the visual arts tends to see the details only after apprehending the whole' (1981: 42).<sup>7</sup> Narrative in cinema differs from literary texts or paintings as it has an automatic duration: it depends on the running of time that cannot be stopped. Cinema, therefore, has a built-in conflict between narrative and time; each frame is a simultaneity that could be apprehended in its entirety if stopped, yet each frame is also a part of a narrative sequence that constantly runs. Furthermore, the non-linearity in the presentation of events can lead to the completion of a linear story. This co-

dependent and complicated relationship between photography, narrative and time is scrutinised further in the following discussions of discontinuity.

Discussing time in film narratives inevitably leads us to film narration. It is impossible to think of narrative as separate from narration. Every narrative has to have a narration; a story is told in a certain way and this telling takes a certain amount of time. Narration comprises those means by which the story is told to us, including points of view, order and duration. If we were to arrive at a definition of narration separate from what we provided for narrative, that is, ‘a story told’, it would have to explain the word ‘told’. Narration, then, refers to the manner in which events are presented, organised and set forth; it consists of modes, methods and procedures. Indeed, one of the most important characteristics of narration is that it is a process. Edward Branigan emphasises this fact and provides a useful definition that clarifies the dependent relationship between narrative and narration: ‘Narrative – construed narrowly as *what* happens in the story – is [...] seen as the *object* or end result of some mechanism or process – narration’ (2004: 65). Similarly, David Bordwell writes in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, ‘We can [...] study narrative as a process, the activity of selecting, arranging and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver. I shall call this process narration’ (1985: xi). Narrative and narration are, therefore, the two co-dependent parts of the same thing; narration is the production of a narrative, the product.

Some characteristics of narration are especially useful in explaining discontinuity, one of which is that it involves an ordering in time. As Gilberto Perez writes, ‘Telling is indeed like counting, not in content, of course, but in form: a story is told in succession, one thing and then another and then another, as things are counted’ (2000: 50). It is this successiveness that creates time and it is evident in any



narration, in any language and historical period.<sup>8</sup> In fact, successiveness is a characteristic that both language and film depend upon. Due to the nature of the filmstrip and projection, narration has to be sequential. Moreover, the cinematic experience of the medium of projected film does not allow for narration to be interfered with, rewound or terminated at will.<sup>9</sup> Another important fact about film narration that is relevant for our discussions of discontinuity is that it sets the spatial, temporal and causal *limits* of the reality of the filmic story. The narration process helps to establish a means for the spectator to construct the story in the desired way and direct attention to more vital information while avoiding anything extraneous. The systematic organisation of narrative elements is pertinent to our understanding and completing the story. Bordwell draws attention to the relationship between narration and coherence and writes, 'Narrational patterning is a major part of the process by which we grasp films as more or less coherent wholes' (1985: 49). Indeed, the discussion of continuity and discontinuity in the following sections will involve further implications of successiveness and patterning in narration.

## **Continuity**

Successiveness generally evokes the term continuity. As discussed above, films inherently depend on a succession of frames and their projection cannot be discontinuous. Films, and consequently film narration, do not stop. Narratives are told within the duration of film time; their telling is continuous. Continuity, however, is seldom used to refer to continuous narration. Although the term has a wide appeal in film studies as a critical and theoretical concept, its usage rarely exceeds the definitions summarised by Kristin Thompson in the widely known book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.<sup>10</sup> She argues that 'the conception of quality in films came to be

bound up with the term [and it] stood for the smoothly flowing narrative, with its technique constantly in the service of the causal chain' (1985: 194-195). Thompson outlines how the concept came to be understood more as a system or a technique rather than a notion: "“Continuity” quickly developed from a general notion of narrative unity to the more specific conception of a story told in visual terms and continuing unbroken, spatially and temporally, from shot to shot. This led to the word’s being applied to the shooting script itself” (196). This is restrictive and non-functional when understanding and evaluating films because it totalises and normalises too many films. This well-known definition of continuity, commonly attributed to Bordwell, refers only to the smooth visual flow; it prioritises the ease with which a narrative is followed and understood. Continuity, in this sense, becomes the organisation of visual elements in a film, so as to offer easy access to the narrative.<sup>11</sup> This perspective is perfectly comprehensible, but for my purposes in this thesis it would be a mistake to accept continuity simply as a sign of quality. According to this perspective, disruptions in visual organisation are considered as obstructions for the audience to follow the narrative flow. In other words, continuity as a system favours comprehension of the story over visuality of the film. Perhaps the job description of continuity clerks explains how this word is tied to the transposition of the script to a film:<sup>12</sup> their main duty on film sets is to ensure that there is a rational connection between scenes, which consists of keeping track of anything that will be in the frame, from costumes and make-up to the positioning of an actor or a prop. Continuity, therefore, primarily requires visual consistency that always benefits the narrative flow. But our film watching experience can show us that we do not always require this precise consistency that the continuity system relies upon.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps it is best to think of continuity in two different definitions: one as a system and one as a concept. As Kristin Thompson argues, before evolving into a system, the term continuity was generally used to refer to narrative unity in terms of space, time and causality. The expectation in fictions films is that the narrative moves forward in time, one action or decision leads to the other and everything happens in a well-established and maintained space, all of which are reinforced by the forward-moving characteristic of the medium. Scenes and sequences in a film are expected to have a logic that maintains the cause and effect relationship as well as the temporal and spatial reality of the filmic world. Continuity as a concept does not necessarily prioritise a smooth flow between shots and scenes; it refers to the existence of a decipherable linking of narrative elements, which can lack smoothness. Continuity as a system, coined and developed by Thompson and Bordwell as mentioned, requires an unbroken visual organisation both spatially and temporally. These two understandings of continuity are co-dependent and their primary aims are seemingly story comprehension and coherence. Unless referred to as a system, this thesis uses the term continuity as a conception that stands for maintaining the temporal, causal and spatial logic of the narrative, which is designed to make the story easily accessible and understandable as well as to preserve the plausibility of the filmic world.

As is easily deducible from the definitions above, most of the time, the primary concern of continuity is the coherence of the film's story and it functions on two levels: visual and narrative. Telling stories requires a unity of time, space and causality, the extent of which is not constant. Different outcomes can arise from different combinations of the lack and presence of narrative and visual continuity. Loosely woven connections between scenes do not always mean that unity is lost.

Moreover, visual oddities within a scene may actually help our following the story. Continuity as a concept, though, is usually evaluated by the consistency and coherence of a narrative, rather than the visual images in films. The photographic quality of the camera is something that significantly contributes to the making of a narrative in film; the discussion of continuity, therefore, should not exclude its relationship with photography. A thorough look at the photographic nature of the medium is essential in order for us to see the ways in which it affects our understanding of continuity.

André Bazin begins his 'Ontology of the Photographic Image' essay by describing the human obsession with preserving life. The example he uses to explain this obsession is the practice of mummy making in ancient Egypt, a practice which connects to science and art and points to a variety of things that both scientists and artists were concerned with for thousands of years.<sup>14</sup> The words that Bazin uses in his introductory paragraph hint at some of them: painting, religion, death, time, reality, sodium and statue; in the lineage of mummies lies the entire history of the symptom that Bazin calls 'preservation of life by a representation of life' (1967: 10). This symptom is diffused in social, cultural, scientific, religious and artistic fields in different forms. As its title suggests, Bazin's principal concern in this essay is the essence of cinema, which he looks for in photography and painting, linked under the idea of 'plastic realism'. According to him, perspective, which is foremost a scientific discovery, has torn painting between aesthetic and psychological ambitions; there is a confusion between these two or, namely, between true realism and pseudorealism. The former is about 'giv[ing] significant expression to the world' (12) whereas the latter is related to the 'duplication of the world' (11) in the likeness of the real and is an extension of illusion and magic. Bazin proposes that science has

triggered this confusion in art that did not exist in Medieval times. He further adds that photography, and later cinema, 'are discoveries that satisfy [...] our obsession with realism' (12). Photography has eliminated the tension in plastic arts that Bazin claims to have existed because of its 'essentially objective character' (13). He writes,

we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (13-14)

Bazin's understanding of realism, therefore, is derived from his argument that the photographic image is the model itself and, further, 'cinema is objectivity in time' (14). However, the roots of this realism are found back in history, in the obsession with preserving life, in both arts and sciences. And though the plastic arts are relieved from the so-called tension between the aesthetic and psychological, Bazin suggests that this phenomenon still continues to exist in photography. He writes, 'The aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities' (15), but soon expands this argument with a challenging statement: 'photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact' (16).

Decades later, in 1980, Roland Barthes discusses similar notions in *Camera Lucida*.<sup>15</sup> Although his book is on photography and not cinema, Barthes also arrives at his arguments through an evaluation of the essence of the image. His concern, like Bazin's, is with the imprint of the object onto celluloid, but his understanding of the aesthetics of realism is also not limited to this indexicality. Barthes writes,

the realists do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art. To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation. (2000: 88-89)

Both writers refer to the camera's non-selectivity and independence, as there is no human hand involved in the capturing process that directs light onto the film to create the image: Barthes, for instance, writes of this non-selectivity that the photographer can 'not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object' (2000: 47), whereas Bazin describes how 'between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent' (1967: 13).

Laura Mulvey draws attention to some of these overlapping ideas in her book *Death 24x a Second* where she discusses how in both writings, 'expression of paradox and ambivalence recur, bearing witness to the surprising connection between reality and the uncanny. Both writers evoke a narrow, or blurred, boundary between emanations of the material world and those of the human imagination' (2006: 63).<sup>16</sup> Hinting at this connection Bazin writes, 'Only the impassive lens [...] is able to present [the object] in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently my love' (1967: 15). For Barthes also, a 'photograph [...] transcends itself' (2000: 45) and 'ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes' (53). A similar issue is raised by Cavell when he admits in the foreword to the second edition of *The World Viewed* that his analyses of films had been based on his memory of those films. He writes, 'The question of what constitutes, in various arts, "remembering a work", especially in light of the matter of variable quotability, naturally raises the question of what constitutes, or expresses, "knowing a work"' (1979: x). Cavell explains that he has intentionally omitted the errors he has made because he is 'as interested in how a memory went wrong as in why the memories that are right occur when they do' (x). The point is that although Bazin, Barthes and Cavell account for the objectivity of the camera and the

indexicality of the image in their approaches, their criticism includes subjective responses and personal reflections, including a questioning, doubting, reasoning and even fearing that which is represented or its authenticity. The image looks like the object(s) as they were at a certain point in time and it is created without human intervention. This likeness together with the non-human creation process generates an ambiguity that both Barthes and Bazin draw attention to. Added to this, there is the issue of the image's independence; from the moment it is created, the image starts to exist as an object on its own. This complex structure of the photographic image denotes a multiplicity of meanings; thus, subjectivity is an indispensable element in reading the photographic image, without which it would not be accessible. The relationship between the object and the image becomes more complicated in cinema; on top of the issues of likeness, capturing of time and the lack of human intervention, there is the factor of movement. Mulvey uses the term uncertainty to describe this characteristic of the cinematic image, writing:

[Cinema's] relation to reality is, of course, shared with photography, and comes from the tradition of the camera obscura, while its movement belongs to the tradition of optical illusions that exploit a peculiar ability of the human eye to deceive the mind.

A mind bewildered by optical and other kinds of illusions, doubting the reality of what it sees with its own eyes, is more prepared to be credulous when exposed to the emanations of the supernatural. An otherwise confident and competent relation to the world is suddenly faced by a sense of uncertainty. (2006: 33-34)

This corresponds to Bazin's questioning of reality in cinema. He writes, 'If the paradox of the cinema is rooted in the dialectic of concrete and abstract [...], it becomes all the more important to discern those elements in filming which confirm our sense of natural reality and those which destroy that feeling' (1967: 110).

Uncertainty can perhaps be explained with the co-existence of these conflicting elements. Furthermore, uncertainty can be thought of as an extension of the perpetual friction between the photographic nature of cinema that reveals reality and its

sequential nature, which creates the illusion of movement in time. The arguments of these three writers intersect at the point when they discuss the dialectical nature that they attribute to images in general.

As stated above before, continuity in cinema is rarely discussed in reference to the nature of photographic images. However, following the ideas outlined in the previous paragraph, derived from Bazin, Barthes and Mulvey, one can say that one intended function of continuity is to reduce the paradox, uncertainty or friction in cinematic images. Generally, it is undesirable for an audience to stop suspending their disbelief, to interrupt their involvement with a plausible filmic world and to stop following the story. Therefore, continuity demands that the difference between fiction and non-fiction, fantasy and reality, and subjectivity and objectivity remains minimal through editing, framing, performances and other features of filmmaking. The films that this thesis explores trespass this aspect of continuity and reveal the paradoxical nature of cinematic images. The question that the next chapters deal with, however, is whether such an intrusion dismantles narrative unity.

Two things form the basis of cinema: the creation of photographic images in the likeness of the real without human intervention and the illusion of movement. However, there is one piece missing from this picture. Going back to Bazin's argument, discussed above, the human obsession with preserving life is not simply fulfilled by representation; the other component is storytelling. The preservation of anything involves an expression and transfer of its history. Stories are a method of expression and transfer and they have been a part of human existence since prehistoric times. In fact, this obsession is directly related to both visual and narrative continuity. Cinema is an ideal medium to bring the two together: its essential photographic characteristics satisfy the desire for visual continuity and the filmstrip provides the



illusion of movement needed for narrative continuity. The sequential essence of cinema produces movement and time in films; and these two concepts are matched with the obsession with storytelling, which is part of efforts to 'preserve life'. Theories of realism in cinema are based on visual continuity (emerging from its photographic essence) as much as narrative continuity (emerging from its sequential essence). In other words, the ontology of the medium is inevitably reflected and sought through the visual representations and stories produced. The historical development of cinema shows that storytelling is the dominant form in filmmaking, with visual style usually supporting narrative continuity. The filmstrip, its projection and cinematic sequentiality evoke narrative continuity since succession and narrative are closely related. Telling stories in a medium that is essentially sequential is not unusual.

Continuity, then, is a concept that should be thought both in terms of the medium's sequential and photographic nature; this means thinking about how space, time and causality are visualised on the screen. This visualisation generally requires that there be both narrative and visual continuity. The next question to ask, then, is whether there is a direct correlation between visual discontinuity and narrative discontinuity or whether they are independent. For example, does mismatching sound and image always obstruct our understanding of a story? Likewise, if continuity is equated with unity that allows easier access to the story, does discontinuity always produce the opposite outcome? Does it ruin coherence and meaning? I believe, by closely analysing the style of those films that we readily label as exhibiting discontinuity, we can arrive at a more detailed understanding of both continuity and its counterpart. There is not much extensive research in film studies that discusses discontinuity as a separate subject; writers who do so either define discontinuity in

relation to continuity and treat it as an anomaly in narrative and narration, or they evaluate it within the context of avant-garde or experimental filmmaking. The lack of distinctive research on the subject also limits understanding of the term. The following section is a brief account of discontinuity; it explains how the term should be understood in the thesis and introduces its categories.

### **Defining Discontinuity**

Derived from looking at those examples in which we do not encounter continuity, discontinuity refers to a break in narrative unity and/or a disruption in the narration, all of which seem to lead to an incoherence of the story. Generally, the effect of discontinuity is such that it directly surprises, disengages or disturbs us, and consequently, an unusual or an unconventional style is readily labelled as a mark of discontinuity. For instance, the switch from video tape recordings to the film's actual scenes in *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005) is ambiguous; making it difficult to ascertain the time and place the image belongs to. In some scenes, information is completely withheld from the audience as to what the image is. Such a use inhibits the construction of a continuous time and space as well as it manipulates the cause and effect relationship; both these effects are further discussed in the following chapters. There is a linear storyline in *Caché*, but this stylistic use interferes with the reality of the filmic world and it disrupts the narrative by leaving some gaps. Similar to continuity, then, discontinuity is here defined in terms of the characteristics of narration and narrative.

As stated above, discontinuity is usually evident in films that make use of a conspicuous style; a diverse and fresh stylistic choice is something that we are unfamiliar with and it may also prevent us from following the narrative.

Conspicuousness in style is not exclusive to contemporary cinema. For instance, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948) and *Bonjour Tristesse* (Otto Preminger, 1958) are highly stylised films. So too are *Bande à part* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1964), *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966), *La Notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961) and *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973). The latter films, however, have a distinct way of drawing attention to how they are telling their stories: their style is much more obvious. The first group of films smoothly engage us with their narratives whereas the others employ a manifest style that requires attention and works to disturb this engagement. The intentional use of deep focus or low camera angles in *Citizen Kane* indeed create meaning, but they are less noticeable compared to the way the close-ups in *Persona* or sound and silence in *Bande à part* are used. In other words, style supports the stories in the first group of films, but it moderates and partially creates the stories in the second group. Recently, in contemporary cinema, the tendency has been towards breaking the rules of conventional storytelling and utilising discontinuity and fragmentation in new ways, similar to the second group of films. The question this thesis considers is whether the disruptions that we notice in films like *Memento*, *Dogville* and *Manderlay* are used to break our involvement with the narrative or, on the contrary, whether they are meant to add to the overall meaning by providing hints for deciphering the stories.

Before moving to the categories of discontinuity, it is useful to review one of the most well-known studies of modes of narration. Although he does not use the word discontinuity, David Bordwell discusses similar cases in his book *Narration in the Fiction Film*. The conspicuousness of style that I discuss here is seemingly what he describes as parametric narration; however, some significant differences prevail.

He explains that ‘in parametric narration, style is organised *across the film* according to distinct principles’ (1985: 281), yet it is ‘independent of syuzhet principles’ (283).<sup>17</sup> The films that this thesis is concerned with all have a patterned style that develops across the film, which fits Bordwell’s definition. However, this style is never independent of the narrative. In fact, one of the main differences between Bordwell’s viewpoint and mine is the fact that he can separate style from narrative and narration. By analysing parametric films, he arrives at the conclusion that ‘style [is] motivated neither realistically nor compositionally nor transtextually’ (289). Bordwell claims that in this group of films, style gains an autonomous function and it usually dominates the narrative. Moreover, he writes, ‘If a film’s stylistic devices achieve prominence, and if they are organised according to more or less rigorous principles, independent of syuzhet needs, then we need not motivate style by appealing to thematic considerations’ (283). In other words, Bordwell proposes that style in parametric films should not be interpreted and evaluated according to the films’ content. He considers this an ‘error [that] lies in assuming that style and syuzhet have a fixed relation to one another’ (283). It is true that for any narrative, numerous alternatives of style can be used. However, this does not mean that style and narrative do not have a fixed relation within a film; those possibilities that have not been realised do not affect the final outcome on the screen. The kind of films that Bordwell fits into his category of parametric narration seem to fit my category of discontinuity films in terms of style’s development across the films and its conspicuousness. However, I argue that style cannot be thought as a separate entity in the film; even if it feels like dominating the story, this is because it becomes complementary to the film’s content. This notion is explained further in the following paragraphs.

Bordwell's other similar category, art-cinema narration, could also be compared and contrasted to discontinuity films. According to him, art-cinema narration 'tak[es] its cue from literary modernism' and it 'dedramatize[s] the narrative' (206); 'The film will deal with "real" subject matter [and] the mise-en-scène may emphasise verisimilitude of behaviour as well as verisimilitude of space or time' (206). In this category, style is not autonomous as before. Bordwell writes, 'Syuzhet and style constantly remind us of an invisible intermediary that structures what we see' (211). He then proposes that this is a 'highly self-conscious narration' coming from an 'author' (211). In other words, Bordwell's art-cinema narration is a process in which we see the evidence of the filmmaker consciously interfering with style and syuzhet. This interference, he believes, is defined by the degree of 'deviations from the classical norms' (211). In the examples of this thesis, discontinuity has a similar effect; however, it should not only be taken as a sign of filmmakers' control over their storytelling. As argued above, such uses are also a part of films' content. Bordwell writes, and I agree, 'the very construction of narration becomes the object of spectator hypotheses: how is the story being told? Why tell the story in this way?' (210). Once it leaves a question in the spectator's mind, it cannot be thought of as separate from what the film is telling. The following statement approaches my argument: 'The ambiguity of art cinema is of a highly controlled and limited sort, standing out against a background of narrational coherence' (222). There are characteristics that Bordwell outlines which could explain discontinuity in films, but neither of the categories could comprise all the films in focus here. The highly stylized editing of *Memento*, for instance, would put this film in the category of parametric narration. However, the film can also belong to the art-cinema category because of the way its narration initiates essential questions for the spectators. As is

evident in his book, Bordwell defines and categorises parametric and art-cinema films against the norms of classical cinema, assuming that spectators always ‘seek realistic motivation’ (212). In contrast, the films in this thesis are evaluated independently from that which is considered conventional and classical.

The case studies in this thesis do not fit fully into any of Bordwell’s categories but they overlap with several. One of the reasons for this is perhaps the fact that Bordwell wrote *Narration in the Fiction Film* more than two decades ago. Indeed, he returns to some of the arguments mentioned above in his more recent work, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006).<sup>18</sup> According to his observations, recently, the dominant style of parametric narration seems to have coupled with the self-conscious narration of art-cinema. Bordwell claims that in contemporary films ‘unusual techniques need to be situated in an especially stable frame’ (2006: 78). And this stability is seemingly derived from the category of classical filmmaking. Bordwell pursues the same viewpoint as before, which prioritizes spectators’ need to understand the story and the established structures in filmmaking which fulfil this need. I agree that his case studies and most of the contemporary examples in this thesis lie somewhere between art-cinema and parametric narration; however, I do not believe, as Bordwell does, that this is a new version of classical filmmaking. Instead of solely looking at classical examples as the norm and seeing these new films as a development from them, I argue that it is just as useful to trace the history of unconventional examples and pinpoint what kinds of stylistic characteristics have been adopted from these examples into the mainstream.

In *Film Art*, Bordwell and Thompson discuss spatial and temporal discontinuity in a section titled ‘Alternatives to Continuity Editing’ (1997: 300-310). As is evident from the title, discontinuity is considered only in terms of editing and as

opposed to the principles of continuity that the authors have previously outlined. Starting with examples from experimental cinema, they then refer to musicals, films by Ozu and Eisenstein, French impressionist filmmaking and Soviet avant-garde cinema. Because Bordwell and Thompson take the continuity system as ensuring the delivery of a meaningful story, they argue that graphic and rhythmic editing ‘may override the spatial and temporal dimensions; when this happens, narrative becomes proportionately less important’ (302). Bordwell and Thompson provide examples from many filmmakers including Tati, Godard, Resnais and Lang as they continue to explain spatial and temporal discontinuities. Instead of being used as alternative storytelling tools, according to them, discontinuities are generally interruptions in the cause and effect chain in the form of jump cuts, non-diegetic inserts, inconsistent match on actions and ellipses.<sup>19</sup> In the conclusion of their detailed reading of *October* (1928), however, they state that Eisenstein’s ‘editing discontinuities force the viewer to work out implicit meanings’ (309). Bordwell and Thompson are more interested in the kinds of forms in which discontinuities can exist whereas this thesis intends to present the specificities of these forms as well as attempts to understand in what ways they produce the so-called *implicit meanings*.

Another influential article that is relevant to thinking about narrative and discontinuity is Peter Wollen’s ‘Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d’Est*’. Writing in 1972, Wollen defines a counter-cinema against mainstream Hollywood and lists seven characteristics of the former as opposed to the seven values of Hollywood film.<sup>20</sup> At first glance, the features that Wollen lays out for counter-cinema resemble those of the main case studies that this thesis focuses on. Narrative intransitivity, multiple diegesis and aperture are some of the most common characteristics that are noticeable in discontinuity films. Wollen’s list is valid for the period during which he is writing

and the clear-cut distinction he makes between Hollywood and various political, revolutionary and artistic counterparts is meaningful. However, his discussion of a straightforward opposition between two types of cinema seems inappropriate, even futile within the context of contemporary cinema. Many mainstream Hollywood films increasingly resemble the counter-films that Wollen describes in his article. However, it is questionable, and it is interest to this thesis, whether such contemporary examples produce the effects that Wollen ascribes to counter-films. For instance, in his first category of opposite features ‘narrative transivity vs. narrative intransivity’, Wollen proposes that there is a ‘chain of causation’ in Hollywood cinema and that ‘the beginning of the film starts with establishment, which sets up the basic dramatic situation – usually an equilibrium, which is then disturbed [...] until in the end a new equilibrium is restored’ (1985: 500). According to him, Godard has destroyed this principle in *Vent d’Est*, which he summarises as

Digressions, which, in earlier films, represented interruptions to the narrative have hypertrophied until they dominate the film entirely. The basic story, as much of it remains, does not have any recognizable sequence, but is more like a series of intermittent flashes. Sometimes it seems to be following a definite order in time, but sometimes not. The constructive principle of the film is rhetorical, rather than narrative [...] (500)

This description could well apply to contemporary Hollywood films such as *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) and *The Master* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2012). Wollen continues to argue that Godard ‘can disrupt the emotional spell of the narrative and thus force the spectator, by interrupting the narrative flow, to reconcentrate and refocus his attention’, which for him is a mark of a modern art that resists ‘to “capture” its audience without apparently making it think, or changing it’ (500). What he identifies as features of Godard’s filmmaking is now valid for many Hollywood films as well as examples from other world cinemas, but whether



they force the audience to think or not is a complicated question. Although discontinuity in films exhibits formal characteristics similar to those of Wollen's counter cinema, its effects are not as straightforward as he explains and deserve close attention in order to be articulated.

As discussed previously, discontinuity is often equated with an interruption of the temporal, spatial or causal unity in the narrative, which exhibits itself through an oddity in style. Ordinarily, the main function of stylistic choices is to support the story. All discontinuity films, however, have at least one dominating stylistic choice, which seems to exist almost autonomously. In other words, style becomes a prominent entity, one which seemingly inhibits constructing and following narrative and narration. However, when observed closely, style is never independent from the story; it is only the relationship between style and story that changes. It is essential to look at this relationship, which is one of the defining traits of discontinuity.

Stylistic possibilities can be categorised as technological, dramatic, economic, spatial or temporal and they may emerge from various dimensions of the filmmaking process: the range of camera lenses or filters; the height, flexibility or lightness of cranes, dollies or steadycams; controllability, cost and time effectiveness, which new digital editing software or sound design technologies permit; the nature of sets and locations, screenplay and *mise en scène*. Throughout the history of narrative cinema, the exploration of stylistic possibilities has mostly manifested itself in the form of *supplementing* the content, which is, usually in fiction films, a story. This supplementing comes through the image. Stylistic possibilities are generally utilised to create the world of the story, the diegesis, and their coherence and consistency make the diegesis achievable. Supplementing the story means the subtle use of a combination of stylistic possibilities and the support they provide to the story without

revealing their actuality. An example of a stylistic choice supplementing the story would be the disproportionate framing of a character against a vast space to underline her isolation, such as in the final scene of *Le Boucher* (Claude Chabrol, 1970) when the camera zooms out to show Hélène (Stéphane Audran) sitting on the cliff or as in *La Notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961) when Lydia (Jeanne Moreau) is photographed by the huge walls of the modern house. Other examples include the zooming in to a close-up of female characters' accessories in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) and *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980) to emphasise their importance in the later scenes, or the use of sound to increase curiosity and suspense. Style as a supplement of narrative does not disrupt us, but rather guides us through the film. The conveyance of the story depends on the coherence of certain stylistic possibilities; they have a pattern and have not been chosen randomly. Thus, style in cinema comprises the chosen patterns, which make a feature of filmmaking a cinematic possibility by adding meaning to the story. The result of this process of selecting and combining particular features, turning them into possibilities, benefits that particular story.

Style orients us towards the story world in terms of space, time and causality. It is the mediator of meaning. Conventionally, however, elements of style are supplements to the story, establishing a tone, mood or point of view. On a first viewing, we may not identify these elements individually, but enjoy the feeling produced from their combination. A shift in temporality can be cued by dialogue, captions, acting or setting or a shift in tone can be supported by a change in lighting, camera angles or framing, but we may not pay attention to these as we are watching a film. The inclination towards and the demand for an illusion of narrative continuity rarely allow each element of style to manifest itself too conspicuously. Discontinuity

allows film style to exceed its position as something which supplements the story; it makes it into a part of the narrative itself. The case studies in this thesis, for instance, depend on their particular style so much so that if they lacked it, their stories would lose some of their meaning and fall apart. The relationship between style and story in these cases shifts from the former supplementing the latter to complementing it. Style no longer exists as a mediator of meaning, but becomes a part of the meaning. One of the main questions of this thesis, then, concerns the analysis of the complementary relationship between style and story in cinema. This analysis also asks whether discontinuity can be perceived as having a unifying effect in the construction of stories and whether it can assume a thematic function.

As briefly mentioned above, there is no extensive research in film studies that devotes itself solely to the concept of discontinuity. The discussion of this term is usually found in parts of book chapters and in some articles that are actually about narrative, time, digital technologies and early or avant-garde cinema. Most of the time, the word is freely used as an indicative of that which lacks or opposes continuity and it refers to a shock, a break or an interference. On the one hand, this usage is not surprising as discontinuity has to presuppose a continuity in order to exist. However, the functions, meanings and outcomes produced by the use of discontinuity have not been thoroughly discussed in those cases where continuity does not dominate the narrative and narration. Similar to the way it is generally conceived, this thesis takes the definition of discontinuity as a break in narrative unity which dismantles established notions of time, space and causality in a film, usually manifesting itself through an oddity in style. In addition to defining discontinuity, the thesis aims to discover the different functions and effects it produces in different films and to compare these with those of continuity.

Having said that there is no extensive research dedicated to the concept of discontinuity, one of the most well-known articles about discontinuity in film is Tom Gunning's 'Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Films', in which Gunning explains the narrative of discontinuity in early film with parallel editing. He writes,

Parallel editing represents a discontinuity on the level of plot (the actual assembly of shots) that disrupts the continuity of action on the level of story (the carriage rushing down the road, the movement of the clock hands). By intertwining two lines of action, it literally suspends the outcome of each one, creating that device of narrative delay which is known as suspense. (1997b: 92)

It is not surprising that Gunning makes a connection between discontinuity and the withholding of knowledge in the example that he discusses, that of parallel editing producing suspense. If we recall the discussion about the definition of narrative in the previous sections, not only all narratives necessitate a kind of ordering of events, but also this ordering should lead to coherence. Susan Sontag explains this simply: 'One tactic upheld by traditional narrative is to give "full" information, so that the ending of the viewing or reading experience coincides, ideally, with full satisfaction of one's desire to "know", to understand what happened and why' (1967: 188). In other words, order and arrangement in visual and narrative continuity are linked to producing coherence and meaning. Writing about narrativizing history, Hayden White explains that 'every narrative, however seemingly "full", is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out' (1980: 14). Similarly, a film's story can be told in numerous ways; preserving fullness is related to maintaining continuity. As Robert Scholes argues,

Both history and fiction assume the normal flow of events, and the interpretation of both kinds of texts involves the construction of a diegesis in which this flow is re-created by the interpreter with every event in order and all relationships as clear as possible. (1980: 211)

In fact, as Scholes explains, ‘our need for chronological and causal connection defines and limits all of us’ (211). The temporal, spatial and causal orders in a narrative are very much to do with our desire to know, and continuity is, therefore, related to making meaning.

Discontinuity, on the other hand, as in Gunning’s example above, is associated with gaps in knowledge, jumps in time or interferences with an established point of view. In other words, discontinuity refers to upsetting the process of putting the pieces of information given in a narrative into a coherent order. Scholes calls these kinds of narratives anti-narratives and argues that

they ultimately force us to draw our attention away from the construction of a diegesis according to our habitual interpretive processes. By frustrating this sort of closure, they bring the codes themselves to the foreground of our critical attention, requiring us to see them as codes rather than as aspects of human nature or the world. The function of anti-narrative is to problematize the entire process of narration and interpretation for us. (211)

Scholes also ascribes the term postmodern to these narratives, as they dismantle the kinds of codes embedded in them, being aware of the processes and viewpoints that spectators use to decipher a narrative. Perhaps these anti-narratives can be compared to Bordwell’s parametric narratives in the sense that meaning in a story loses its importance; furthermore, the story’s structure and the ways to construct that structure gain autonomy. However, the films that this thesis focuses on do not wholly disregard the story. The discontinuity apparent in these films does not inhibit the story. In other words, although discontinuity presupposes continuity and its definition is derived from its counterpart, its function does not transform accordingly, which is something that will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

We have reviewed that continuity as a system stands for the techniques developed to transfer a smoothly flowing narrative. Likewise, continuity as a concept refers to the unity of space, time and causality. All together, continuity is regarded as

leading to a better construction of meaning in a story and an easier understanding.

When opposed to these definitions, discontinuity suggests breaks in the narrative flow that destroy unity and, consequently, the meaning in a story. The aim of this thesis is to scrutinize this suggestion. Looking at examples in which discontinuity dominates the films this thesis takes discontinuity as a device and questions its function. Does it produce a discontinuity effect in the overall meaning? Can narrative continuity be achieved by visual discontinuity? Conversely, can disunity of time, space and causality in the narrative be achieved with visual continuity? How related is discontinuity as a device to discontinuity as a concept?

One of the difficulties encountered when explaining discontinuity in cinema comes from the fact that our minds readily fill in the blanks. Meir Sternberg explains this, referring to *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950): ‘On our part, knowing that we do not know and may never be told for sure, we must take immediate steps to repair the breach in order and understanding as best we can at the moment [...] in the hope for progressive enlightenment and ultimate closure’ (1992: 525). Our desire for knowledge and coherence encourages us to complete what we find to be incomplete. The narrative unfolds and its fragments and absences are dissolved in the sequentiality of the filmstrip. Moreover, sequentiality does not always match causality, but the former can be mistaken for the latter. As Paul Ricoeur writes, ‘To tell what has happened is to tell why it happened. At the same time, following a story is a difficult, laborious process, which can be interrupted or blocked [and] the “one because of the other” is not always easy to extract from the “one after the other”’ (1984: 97). In this sense, lapses in sequentiality may not always produce gaps in our knowledge or understanding of causality. Certain uses, even though they are similar, may have different effects depending on the films’ subjects.

Due to the nature of the filmstrip and projection, films are inevitably continuous: the filmstrip involves sequentiality and, thus, creates a movement and a duration when recorded frames are projected onto the screen.<sup>21</sup> When we watch a film, we watch a visually continuous work, from beginning to end; the gaps and discontinuities never belong to the material film but to the story. To tell a story, a filmmaker has to bring together all things necessary, from performances to locations to camera work; discontinuity is a precondition for the creation of a story. Ironically, therefore, films depend on, necessitate and imply discontinuity, as there is always a kind of an amalgamation involved. Not surprisingly, the definition of continuity in film narrative is generally narrowed down to and mistaken for a forced, superficial connection of filmic events, performances, settings or shots and it is always discussed in relation to story. In other words, continuity is defined by how linear and coherent a film's story is. In fact, film narrative does not demand a patterned, linear and artificial continuity that relies on a strict organisation of spatial, temporal and causal unity as it involves visual style as much as the story.

Writing about the patterns of modern forms of cinema, Andràs Bálint Kovács spares a section to this subject in his book *Screening Modernism*. The explanations provided in this thesis of the complicated and intertwined relationship of continuity and discontinuity resemble those given by Kovács. He writes,

Continuity and discontinuity are commonly measured through narrative. Huge time and space lapses as well as representation of different mental and time dimensions with little or no relationship to one another make a narrative fragmented. In this respect continuity and discontinuity are not dependent on the length of the takes. Frequent cuts and takes of a couple of seconds long do not necessarily make a fragmented structure; just like extremely long takes alone are not necessary for a continuous narrative. However, the audiovisual texture of a film can be also continuous or fragmented regardless of the continuous or disrupted character of the narration. The idea of continuity therefore can be conceived of as a two-dimensional feature of the film form: continuity of the narrative and continuity of the audiovisual texture. These two dimensions provide us with four basic variations of continuous/discontinuous narrative and visual texture. (2007: 124-5)

Kovács similarly conceives continuity as twofold: narrative and audiovisual. He then lists the four different variations, namely visual continuity, visual discontinuity, narrative continuity and narrative discontinuity. By pairing each type, he arrives at four different film categories. Kovács's examples are useful in that they propose that discontinuity does not always exist at both levels at the same time; the merging of two can produce the opposite outcome. The jump cuts in *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960), for instance, do not interfere with the narrative continuity in the film.

Likewise, the long takes in *L'Eclisse* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1962) maintain visual continuity, but the loosely motivated links between scenes produce significant gaps in the narrative causality or continuity. However, what Kovács takes as visual is limited to duration and the order of shots; he does not include the stylistic characteristics used to establish and maintain the reality of the filmic world. The changing of actors for the role of Conchita in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (Luís Buñuel, 1977), for instance, is mostly a visual discontinuity rather than a narrative one because the narrative flows and the character remains the same. This is a shift that makes us pay attention to the transfer from one actor to the other, not attained by editing or camera tricks. The same rule applies to the choice of soundstages in *Dogville* and *Manderlay*; although the physical limits of the settings are obvious, its details are imaginary, achieved mostly by the actors' performances and the use of lights and camera. The narrative continuity in these films is not obliterated by such stylistic usages. The criteria for visual continuity therefore exceed those set by Kovács. In fact, such instances can be said to affect both narrative and visual dimensions because they are disruptions in the film's narration. Shifting genre conventions, tone or point of view can create these instances in which the elements of the profilmic event are significant, supported by cinematic techniques.



In the light of the characteristics of discontinuity presented above, the following paragraphs introduce different types of discontinuity, on which the rest of the chapters in the thesis are based. These categories recall those explained by Kovács and they build on the separation of visual and narrative. However, this separation does not mean that they are independent. Visual and narrative (dis)continuity are intertwined; the existence of one can affect the other. The types described below, therefore, do not strictly isolate the films that belong to them; they may overlap. Although this last part explains the main focus and structure of the thesis, the details are brought out through the close analyses of films in the next chapters.

Discontinuity is defined mostly against two criteria: linearity of the story told (which matches with the understanding of the continuity of narrative explained above) and coherence of reality in the fictional world (which matches with the continuity of audiovisual texture). The expectation is that the narrative unfolds in a clear order and the established rules of the fictional world continue to apply in a consistent way. Non-linear storylines urge the viewer to re-organise scenes into linear structures that are more easily understood. Likewise, a shift between non-fiction and fiction is usually disruptive as it makes the viewer re-consider the nature of the events in the film. Not surprisingly, some of the most common words used to explain discontinuity are non-linearity, fragmentation and lapses in time, space, and causality. Discontinuity seemingly occurs, therefore, when the film violates the expectations about the two criteria above, both of which are generally maintained by a reliable narration. Film narration lays down the temporal, spatial and causal *limits* of the filmic story; changes in point of view or genre conventions, for instance, can easily

affect both linearity and coherence. Therefore there is a final criterion that discontinuity depends on: consistency in film narration.

Discontinuity films, then, violate at least one of the following: linearity of story, reality of fictional world or consistency in film narration. In order to study discontinuity's different functions and effects, this thesis groups similar types of discontinuity films together, drawing on these three criteria. These types are examined in three chapters with the following headings: 'Non-linear Narratives', 'Telling Stories with Absences' and 'Upsetting Narrations'. The first one covers those examples in which there is non-linear or fragmented storytelling. Usually achieved by the film's editing, these films play with filmic time by rearranging, withholding or repeating scenes. The shuffled temporality in the films affects the cause and effect relationship between scenes as well as the established sense of space. *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* are films that exemplify this type and they are the case studies in the thesis. All these films present their visual discontinuities right from the start; through my analysis of them, I seek to discover what the function of their non-linearities are and whether they contribute to our construction of the narratives. Films that produce discontinuity through the use of absences are grouped under the second chapter 'Telling Stories with Absences'. This chapter will introduce the concept of absence, its function in cinema and how it can be utilised in storytelling.<sup>22</sup> *L'Eclisse*, *Persona* and *Caché* are the films that will be discussed under this section. Except for the famous crack in *Persona*, there is visual continuity in these films; the chapter explores whether there is continuity on a narrative level. The final type of discontinuity will be introduced in the chapter 'Upsetting Narrations', which comprises those films in which there is a change in the mode of narration. Some of these films stretch the interaction of fiction

and non-fiction so much so that the boundaries between the created and the documented events diminish. Moreover, point of view or genre conventions can easily shift in these films, which abruptly changes the way we understand the characters and incidents in the stories. *Viaggio in Italia*, *Une femme est une femme*, *Tirez sur le pianiste*, *Dogville* and *Manderlay* are some of the case studies in this chapter. Similar to the previous two chapters, this chapter will look at the balance and interplay of visual and narrative continuities and discontinuities in these films.

The following chapters, then, are going to explore discontinuity as a mode of filmic storytelling. One of the main questions is whether discontinuity contributes to coherence and continuity in film narratives. Does the obviousness of discontinuities in films, for instance, intervene in the organisation of the stylistic elements? Is this a part of how meaning is constructed? Is non-linearity in *Memento* an irreplaceable storytelling element to explain the mode in which its protagonist experiences life due to his memory problem? What is the function of the abstract sets in *Dogville* and *Manderlay*? Do they extend beyond their conventional purpose and become visual metaphors for the main themes in the film such as ignorance and hypocrisy? We have observed both in the previous chapter and in this one how continuity is applied as a device to produce a continuity effect. Likewise, the thesis sets forth these examples in order to discover whether the same situation is valid also for discontinuity. That is, has discontinuity become a device, how does it function and what effects does it produce? Moreover, can discontinuity be used as a critical concept to study film style and narrative of any film?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *OED* uses the words ‘form, expression and manner’ to define style and ‘subject, matter and substance’ for content.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘style, n.’ Second edition, 1989; online version November 2010. <http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/192315>; accessed 22 December 2010. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Studies of the relationship between technology and film style were most popular in the 1970s. See Comolli (1980); Barr (1963); Buscombe (1985); Ogle (1985) and Salt (1976 and 1977).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Barry Salt refers to ‘a few shots’ in *Gone with the Wind* when writing about a new wide-angle lens for a Technicolor camera that was introduced in the late thirties. His interest lies in the evidence, that is, the presence of ‘a lot of barrel distortion and some reduced definition in the image’ (1983: 276), and not in how this quality affects the style of the film. Writing about sound, Steve Neale explores the technology and the context of the film industry in detail while having no detailed analysis of sound films in the section devoted to aesthetics. His argument is that sound contributed to completing ‘the evolution of the conventions of narrative film’ (1985: 95), hence ‘cinema’s new capacity for realism’ (96). He does not make any interpretations, but only lists the stylistic conventions that the sound era has introduced.

<sup>5</sup> V. F. Perkins writes, ‘Synthesis here, where there is no distinction between how and what, content and form, is what interests us if we are interested in film as film. It is that unity to which we respond when film as fiction makes us sensitive to film as film’ (1976: 133).

<sup>6</sup> Perez’s discussion of the term coincidentally contains references to both Gunning and Genette among other names (2000: 61-62, 422).

<sup>7</sup> Cavell’s description is useful in understanding this: ‘[painting’s] flatness, together with its being of a limited extent, means that it is totally there, wholly open to you, absolutely in front of your senses, of your eyes, as no other form of art is’ (1979: 109). Perez also makes this distinction: ‘Narrative makes life into a sequence; painting makes life into a simultaneity’ (2000: 51).

<sup>8</sup> Borges refers to the limits that language bears for narrating in his short story ‘The Aleph’: ‘What my eyes saw was simultaneous: what I shall describe is successive, because language is successive. Nevertheless, I shall cull something of it all’ (1967: 150).

<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, I refer to the experience of watching a film in a cinema. The spectator does not have the control over time like a reader of a book, for instance.

<sup>10</sup> This book is sometimes mistakenly referenced as David Bordwell’s work, but it actually has three authors, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, who wrote sections separately.

<sup>11</sup> Bordwell and Thompson call this continuity editing and discuss it in a detailed section in the book *Film Art* (1997: 284-300). They present two modes of continuity editing, spatial and temporal, because they argue that ‘it is chiefly through the handling of space and time that editing furthers narrative continuity’ (285).

<sup>12</sup> Thompson explains the development of this job in the mid 1910s: ‘[continuity clerk’s] duties were to take notes on continuity during shooting for future reference when carrying out the connecting scenes’ (152).

<sup>13</sup> In a scene from *Mystery Train* (Jim Jarmusch, 1989) two tourists are walking around Memphis. First we see them going left on a sidewalk against some shop windows. Next is a shot where we see them go to the right of the frame. They are not going back; the camera has crossed the 180-degree line. The camera captures the walk in consequent shots that vary in length and size, which prevents disorientation. Even though continuity system is violated, the continuity of their random walk is maintained.

<sup>14</sup> Bazin writes, ‘If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation. The process might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex’ (1967: 9).

<sup>15</sup> Barthes’s ideas overlap with Bazin’s in many ways, but Barthes refers to him only when he writes briefly about cinema. *Camera Lucida* is an homage to Sartre’s *L’Imaginaire*; although Bazin never explicitly quotes anything from him, there is a possibility and some evidence that his ideas could be

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influenced by Sartre's writing. Dudley Andrew pointed at this possibility in the keynote lecture he gave in May 2008 in *New Directions in Turkish Film Studies IX* at Kadir Has University, Istanbul. He showed passages underlined by Bazin from a copy of *L'Imaginaire* taken from Bazin's own library. For other discussions of commonalities between Barthes and Bazin see MacCabe (1997), Mulvey (2006) and Gunning (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Adam Lowenstein (2007) writes about traces of surrealism in Barthes's and Bazin's ideas of realism.

<sup>17</sup> Bordwell's *syuzhet* and *fabula* are what I call narrative and story respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Some of these findings are discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>19</sup> They write that they 'tend to weaken narrative continuity' (304) and 'create ambiguous relations among shots' (306).

<sup>20</sup> Wollen's list of these opposing features are as follows: narrative transitivity vs. narrative intransitivity; identification vs. estrangement; transparency vs. foregrounding; single diegesis vs. multiple diegesis; closure vs. aperture; pleasure vs. unpleasure and fiction vs. reality. I find this categorisation problematic because concepts like 'identification' and 'pleasure' are effects and consequences of certain uses rather than features, and they cannot be assumed to be homogenous for all audiences. However, I am interested in the formal qualities Wollen sets forth for each category.

<sup>21</sup> The apparatus theory adopted by the *Screen* critics in the 1970s assesses the mechanisms of cinema. Jean-Louis Baudry writes, for instance, 'The projection operation (projector and screen) restores continuity of movement and the temporal dimension to the sequence of static images' (2009: 358). For Baudry, ideology is imposed through narrative and the discontinuity between images is erased by its continuity.

<sup>22</sup> Absence creates discontinuity in many different ways and is an ambiguous concept compared to the categories covered in the other chapters, i.e. non-linearity and shifting narrations. Defining absence on screen is difficult as opposed to, for instance, the immediate visibility of a non-linear narrative. Therefore, Chapter Three spares a theoretical section for absence in its introductory pages.

## Chapter Two

### NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES

#### Introduction

Non-linearity is a term that is by and large used synonymously with discontinuity. If a narrative is described as non-linear, undoubtedly it will disregard temporal unity and present the story events in a non-chronological order. Moreover, the transition from one time period to another may not be clearly marked, which consequently obscures causality and spatiality. Non-linearity, therefore, clearly violates the basic principles of the general understanding of continuity, creating the expectancy that the story will contain omissions and thus be confusing. Films such as *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *21 Grams* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2003), *2046* (Wong Kar Wai, 2004), *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004), *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) and *25<sup>th</sup> Hour* (Spike Lee, 2002) all fall into this category. Sequences in these films are organised regardless of the temporal order in which they take place, or this temporal order is not a priority. When rearranged, the scenes may or may not make up a linear narrative; thus, omissions, repetitions and lapses may exist in the story. Non-linearity is mainly achieved through a film's editing; however, other stylistic elements are also utilised to create changes, leaps and switches in the narrative. Just as jump cuts and inserts can lead to another time and space so can a change in sound, costume or lighting.

Indeed, non-linearity means that the order of scenes in a film is discontinuous, whether it is interrupted, fragmented or shuffled. However, does this imply that non-linearity always produces incoherence in the story? Seemingly, non-linear narratives disregard continuity, thus, the unity of time, space and causality, but does this

condition always leave the final result incomplete and lead to puzzlement? The intention of this chapter is to scrutinise whether the lack of continuity that non-linearity creates can produce a contradictory effect through the analyses of three films: *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961), *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004). *Marienbad* is perhaps the most well-known case of discontinuity in film history. *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine* on the other hand, have been some of the most popular contemporary examples among studies in this subject.<sup>1</sup> This chapter, then, looks at discontinuity through these case studies that have non-linear narratives and aims to investigate what types of functions non-linearity has. These three films incorporate non-linearity in different ways: *Marienbad* is a radical example that completely disregards the construction of a meaningful narrative; *Memento* tells its story through different timelines belonging to past and present and the scenes switch between them, forcing the viewer to make the temporal, spatial and causal connections; *Eternal Sunshine* similarly contains different timelines, but the narrative is more fragmented and less patterned, intermingling past, present, memory and dream. In all these films, some of the primary characteristics of continuity, which are discussed in the previous chapter, are renounced. As explained in that chapter, continuity as a concept requires that there is unity of time, space and cause and effect and the continuity system is designed to easily establish and pursue this unity. Examples of non-linearity, such as the ones listed above, usually produce a disunity of time, which then naturally affects spatiality and causality. The primary problem that this chapter engages in is whether non-linearity exclusively produces this effect. Some relevant questions that are addressed in the following sections are as follows: is it possible for non-linear narratives to produce, maintain and even emphasise

continuity? Can we call a patterned, methodical or sign-posted use of non-linearity a discontinuity system, working to create continuity? Can non-linearity, at the expense of destroying unity, enhance a film's story? What are some of the stylistic choices made to produce these narratives and how do they relate to the films' stories? The following sections include in-depth analyses of the three case studies as well as references to other examples from film history. It examines the functions and effects of non-linearity, which is one of the most common conditions of discontinuity in films.

### **‘I don’t understand a word’<sup>2</sup>: The Narrative of *Marienbad***

In one of the scenes in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, the anonymous characters, the lover (Giorgio Albertazzi), the woman (Delphine Seyrig) and the husband (Sacha Pitoëff), are in a room with a group of people. This short scene starts out with the image of a ceiling decoration; the lover's voice-over seems to be describing its details. The camera slowly tilts down to reveal the characters in the room as the sound of the woman's laughter is heard. The lover and the woman dominate the left side of the frame now and further back are two men dressed in suits. The woman's laughter stops just as the camera stops tilting down, making it unclear whether she has laughed at the words pronounced in the voice-over previously or something else that the man may have said, which was not audible to the audience. Then the camera pans slightly to the right to include the husband in the right side of the frame, who gazes at them incessantly. As the lover proposes to show the woman around the hotel and offers his hand to her, the husband's threatening presence prevails, which neither of them seems to be unaware of (Figure 2.1). In the next shot, we see her taking his hand, unexpectedly responding not to his proposal to a



promenade, but to a dance; this shot reveals that they are no longer in the same room, but in a dance hall with other dancing couples (Figure 2.2). The tension that was



**Figure 2.1** The man proposes to show her around



**Figure 2.2** The woman accepts the dance offer

present between the group of three men against the woman and the lover ceases to exist. The characters have jumped to another time either before or after the talk they had in the previous shot, but definitely to a much more relaxed setting without the husband's presence. Characters, costumes and the location have all changed and there is no reference to the aforementioned shot except for the transitional gesture of taking the hand of the man as an act of consent by the woman. The arrangement of these two shots as consecutive parts withholds information about time, space and causality in the narrative and blurs the boundaries of the scene's beginning and ending.

In another one of the numerous scenes that contain such unusual transitions, the lover and the woman are initially at the hotel's bar. The slow tracking movement continues until the camera stops to frame the couple in a medium shot. Meanwhile the woman listens as the man recollects what has taken place between them (Figure 2.3). Segments from another time and space – presumably from the past – start to



**Figure 2.3** Tracking shot of man and woman at the bar

appear as single frames, rapidly inserted within while the camera angle at the bar keeps changing from left to right. The man explains how he visited her one night in her bedroom last year. As he continues his monologue, the frames momentarily reveal the woman in a white dress against a white background (Figure 2.4). The whiteness of these single frames has a sudden and strong effect when contrasted to the dominance of black at the bar. Later, what began as an abrupt intrusion starts to take over the scene. As the bar shots lose their effectiveness and their duration shrinks, as in the previous example, the scene jumps to another location and continues in the woman's bedroom. Here, the only connecting element between the shots is the continuous voice-over of the man, trying to convince the woman to remember 'last year'. There are no indications that affirm or explain what belongs to present, past, remembrances or fantasies. It appears as if the woman is trapped in his recollections.



**Figure 2.4** A memory of last year?

She does not have any control and she cannot interfere with what the man is constructing as their shared memory. This scene offers in a microcosm a kind of model for the aesthetics of the whole film. It is worked out in such a way that our indefinite orientation towards the narrative is kept constant. It shows, visually and verbally, the tension between the man's and the woman's desires to unite and to separate. Throughout the film, we see the man's attempts to persuade the woman that they had an affair last year. Just as the images seem to confirm the facts articulated through the man's voice-over, they transform into something else and deny them. Although this voice-over suggests the subjective viewpoint of the man, the non-matching images digress from this viewpoint. The withholding of information leads

to the impossibility of confidently explaining when, where and why something happens; this is one of the reasons why the narrative of *Marienbad* never unfolds into a logical or a chronological piece.

Indeed, the non-linearity in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* is a famous example in the history of cinema, the effect of which is puzzlement that is not reduced by multiple viewings. The narrative freely moves forward without any consideration to the establishment of temporal, spatial or causal unity. Questions related to where and when the story is taking place, as well as how it starts and ends, remain only partially answered. The two examples illustrated above are representative of nearly all scenes in the film. Non-linearity is created by a jump cut in the former and with abrupt inserts in the latter. Throughout the film, similar transitions are used to pass from one unspecified moment in time to another. *Marienbad* consists of loosely stitched moments like these, disallowing the possibility to construct and follow a continuity. Moreover, as evident in the examples above, the narrative within each scene is complicated: for instance, it is not always clear what triggers a character's response; voice-over and action in the scenes may contradict one another; and the slow, petrifying movements of the woman and her terseness make it impossible to get a glimpse of her side of the story. As briefly exemplified, *Marienbad* centres itself on discontinuity, in terms of both style and story. It portrays the processes of remembering that each protagonist goes through, both of which are incomplete and different from one another. The film's non-linear narrative contributes to this complex subject by never letting its pieces join together meaningfully. The rest of this section explores this non-linearity in the film, marking out its characteristics and functions in more detail.

In his article, written a couple of months after the release of the film in France in June 1961, André S. Labarthe oddly marks *Marienbad* as the ‘last of the great neo-realist films’ (Labarthe 1986: 54). His surprising observation concerns the discontinuity in the film’s editing rather than other elements that constitute style, such as *mise en scène*, photography or the acting, which have nothing in common with the characteristics of neo-realism. In *Marienbad*, unlike in the majority of neo-realist films, everything before the camera is carefully organised: randomness is a rare possibility. In many scenes, characters are framed as looking away to something outside the frame. But there is never a reverse shot for us to see what they are looking at. The effect of such a succession of discontinuous images is drastically different from neo-realism; it is impossible to fill in the blanks and assign coherent relations between time, space and causality. The setting, formed of endless corridors and rooms that open on to one another, is like a Möbius band: the characters arrive ‘once again’ at the same place, but on another level.<sup>3</sup> The ghostly movements of the actors are sometimes frozen or disrupted and their dialogue follows a similar pattern, resembling nothing we know in the real world. As a whole, *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* may seem very different from a neo-realist film, but the discontinuity in its editing, as Labarthe suggests, originates from this period in the history of cinema. He argues that

The neo-realist film presents a sequence of fragments bound by no apparent logic and separated from each other by gaps, the gaps and fragments representing upstrokes and downstrokes on a canvas which bears no relation to the close-woven fabric from which the cinema had hitherto drawn its sharpest effects. (Labarthe 1986: 54)

Labarthe’s conception of neo-realism sounds unusually expansive, but he specifically refers to the discontinuous nature of editing in neo-realist film and its introduction of the ‘*open-ended* scenario’ to the medium rather than its representation of reality in the

filmic images. In this sense, it is appropriate to mark *Marienbad* as one of the last examples of neo-realism while we can also place the film in the New Wave that has an influence on this discontinuous style.

*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*'s similarity with neo-realism can be found in the way that the film emphasises the meaning created in each image rather than the succession of images. The neo-realist narrative is marked by the flow of images, which does not always require a strict causal order. Discontinuity in editing is therefore not a cause for interruption: instead of their order, contents of individual scenes are highlighted. The gaps and fragments in the neo-realist narrative are a part of the representation of the reality, resembling the way we normally try to make sense of time, space and causality. The fishing sequence in a landmark neo-realist film, *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950), for instance, does not have a direct meaning in the narrative. It documents, almost in real-time, how the men on the island catch fish. The sequence does not explicitly add anything to the story of Karin (Ingrid Bergman) and her personal battle for survival, which, compared to the battle of the people of the island, does not make any sense. Marked also by its length, it is therefore the most striking sequence in the film, providing us with a different perception of the islanders. There is real harshness, complexity and struggle in their lives as opposed to the simplicity that Karin blames them for and submits them to. This sequence is neither about Karin, nor her husband, but it builds up the themes of conflict and misperception, which are actually greater than the characters' stories. Disruptions like these can be filled in, ignored or interpreted as meaningful lapses in the reality of the filmic world. Discontinuity in a film like *Stromboli* does not necessarily break the story into pieces; it is a natural flaw in the organic unity of things. Alain Resnais takes this style to an extreme and makes it the subject of *Marienbad*. Discontinuity in

this film is used to fragment the linearity in such a way as to prevent it from becoming a totality no matter how much we try to reorder the pieces.

There is a heterogeneity that Resnais tries to achieve in his films including *Marienbad*, which Noël Burch describes as ‘leap[ing] from pure, graphic abstractions to documentary realism and [...] even incorporat[ing] stretches of “non-cinema”’ (1960: 28). However, Resnais finds a flow and rhythm in this heterogeneity. In ‘Ten Years After *Marienbad*’, Richard M. Blumenberg notes, ‘[*Marienbad*’s] shots, [...] are not causally connected to one another; rather, they are relative to one another in much the same way as objects in motion [...] are relative to one another’ (1971: 41). Alain Resnais, in an interview in 1998, compares the maze-like structure in *Marienbad* to ‘how we experience life: as a chaos on which we try to impose order. It’s a natural need, so why not put it to dramatic use?’ (Resnais quoted in Duynslaegher 1998: 16). To return once more to Labarthe’s comparison, the feel of the movie bears no resemblance to neo-realism because its subject is not the real world but rather the inner worlds of its characters. Roy Armes writes,

*L’Année Dernière à Marienbad* is a realistic film, as Resnais has said, but it attempts an interior realism of mental processes, not the conventional realism of external events. (1968: 95)

Whereas for the realist film-maker the crucial stage is the actual shooting, for Resnais it is the editing when the elements are synthesised, image related to image and to voice, sound and music, so that the film becomes a combination of a visual rhythm and a sound rhythm. (17)

Commenting on these ‘disconnected fragments’ that form the basis of Resnais’s rhythm, Greg Solman notes that ‘we fail to see the organic flow of our lives, unfolding in time like movies and music’ (2000: 47). No matter how distinct the style of *Marienbad* seems when compared to examples of neo-realism, this sense of ‘organic flow’ is immanent in both styles. This flow requires no ordering, or telling,

but it rather presents things as they are. It does not offer a method for deciphering its meaning; it lets the viewers decide for themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The film's opening scene, composed of tracking shots of the ceilings, the walls and the deserted corridors, leads us to an audience in a dark hall. Before we are introduced to any of the main characters, we see a stage in this hall on which the final scene from a play is being acted out. The woman on the stage says to the man, 'This story is already over. In a few seconds, it will freeze forever', to which he replies, 'Into a marble past, like these statues worked in stone'. The lines in the play are a paradigm of the narrative in the film: every image will freeze forever because they exist within themselves, refusing to be connected or related to any other. There is no story, it seems to be already over, and the film is actually the fragments of what is left behind from a very intense incident. This opening scene is accompanied by a fade-in of the long monologue: 'And once again I made my way alone, along the same corridors, through these same deserted rooms, past these pillars and windowless galleries, through these same doorways, making my way at random in the labyrinth around me'. The source of this mysterious voice is not revealed until much later. The images accompanying the voice-over in the opening scene, together with the suspenseful music, emphasise the feeling of entrapment. As the tracking shots reveal the details of this maze, no information is disclosed about the owner of the voice; moreover, throughout the film, the elements that constitute a shot – acting, photography, sound and dialogue – are always in opposition. *Marienbad* finely balances its arrangement of these elements, which calls for an interpretation of the sequence of shots. However, the film also shows the impossibility of interpretation as each attempt is negated in the following sequence. The discontinuity between the elements that constitute each shot is not explicitly clear. We take some of the facts as



true; we assign voices to people; work back in our memory to question whether we have seen a face or have been in the same place. The film's style presents a version of ordinary perception; it is the interplay between elements in the same shot that enables meaning. Stanley Cavell writes,

If it is part of the grain of film to magnify the feeling and meaning of a moment, it is equally part of it to counter this tendency, and instead acknowledge the fateful fact of a human life that the significance of its moments is ordinarily not given with the moments as they are lived, so that to determine the significant crossroads of a life may be the work of a lifetime. It is as if an inherent *concealment* of significance, as much as its revelation, were part of the governing force of what we mean by film acting and film directing and film viewing. (1995: 19)

Cavell describes here the relationship between concealment and revelation in cinema, things which are of essential relevance to *Marienbad*. The continuous play between concealment and revelation comprises the narrative of the film; something appears to be revealed just as something else is being concealed; it is familiar yet different.

The fragmented structure of the dialogue and voice-over leads to the eradication of the story and the characters, but the spoken words are the only source that provides partial hints about them. The obvious contrast and rivalry between the husband and the lover are conveyed through the language they use. The lover tries to persuade; his words evoke uncertainty rather than confidence, as the woman constantly invalidates them. Unceasingly he questions the affair of last year. His voice is dominant in the film's narrative, but his sentences are not persuasive enough for the woman until the end of the movie. The sound of his voice is in opposition with his meaning, another contradiction in the movie. The husband, on the other hand, is laconic, but he is precise and tells facts. He 'can lose, but [he] always win[s]'. When the man and the woman are staring at the picture of the garden and trying to write a story for the statues, he comes into the scene from behind to 'give accurate information' on the statues and what their postures symbolise. His existence

becomes more threatening and dominant with his words as he explains the sculptures: the man and the woman never agree and they can be easily separated. The husband represents accuracy, as opposed to the vagueness that the man and woman represent. Although it inhibits the construction of a story, the text (e.g. dialogue and voice-over) is the only element in the film that one can rely on to get some idea about who these characters are, what has happened, what will happen or what is happening. The dichotomy between accuracy and vagueness is manifested in the text as much as in the image: the shots are in no causal order and they jump from one space-time continuum to another. This fluctuation between two ends is one of the basics of discontinuity. The film stresses the independence of the layers of sound, voice, image and dialogue. There is always a reluctance and a temptation to put all these on top of one another so they match. However, it is the independence of these different elements that make the story itself. The gist of the story of *Marienbad* is the resistance between the man and the woman: the woman does not want to remember, the man insists that they have been together a year before this time. Just like the resistance in their dialogues and actions, the film resists cohering visually and aurally: ‘And once again, we find ourselves separated’.

The style in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* is often credited to scriptwriter Alain Robbe-Grillet, as much as to Alain Resnais. Robbe-Grillet was interested in ‘the possibility of filmmaking for various reasons’ (1968: 90), Armes writes. Quoting Robbe-Grillet, he draws attention especially to ‘the possibility of presenting with every appearance of unquestionable objectivity, what, moreover, is only dream or memory; in a word, what is only imagination’ (90). Resnais and Robbe-Grillet wondered, while discussing the idea of making a film together,

if it would be possible to extend the “flashback” or hypothesis system, so frequent in detective films, to a generalisation of the mental image, that is to say an image presented as realistic but in fact representing either what is happening inside a person or between two people. (Armes 1968: 91)

The use of the word ‘realistic’ points to the photographic and objective nature of the representation. Since this is a representation of ‘inside a person’ or ‘between two people’, ironically, it will always be subjective and open to interpretations. Armes suggests that the images of *Marienbad* ‘represent what is subjectively true, not what is objectively real’ (1968: 104). This is a subjective realism rather than an objective one.<sup>5</sup>

The screenwriting, shooting and post-production processes of *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* were distinctly separated from each other in terms of time; they did not overlap. Alain Robbe-Grillet is the sole writer of the screenplay, which was closer to a shooting script in that it included detailed descriptions of the scenes.<sup>6</sup> The completion of the script initiated the shooting process, which remained faithful to the script. The post-production, unlike conventional filmmaking, started after the shooting was completely finished. Just as Resnais did not interfere with the writing and refrained from excessively changing it during shooting, Robbe-Grillet was not involved in the editing and post-production processes. The discontinuity in *Marienbad* is, therefore, a structure developed from Resnais’s earlier works as well as a form borrowed from the *nouveau roman* in France, of which Robbe-Grillet was one of the pioneers.<sup>7</sup> The initial form of the script was already fragmented, influenced by the style of this trend in literature.

From the beginning, the film was designed as having no single plot in which characters were meticulously constructed; the plot comprises all possibilities to construct a linear, logical and conventional narrative from the unfolding layers of meaning. The characters in the film, unlike those in the script, have no names.<sup>8</sup> The

refusal to name characters is a direct reference to their nature and the nature of the film narrative in turn: there is no coherent explanation for anything in the film and the narrative resists construction. In one of the scenes, when the lover is talking about a conversation they had about the statue in the garden, he says, 'Both explanations were possible'. This is similar to Robbe-Grillet saying that 'We can imagine *Marienbad* is a documentary on a statue, with interpretative views of the gestures, with a return each time to gestures themselves, such as they remain, frozen in the sculpture' (Armes 1968: 113). The film holds infinite explanations, similar to the infinite perceptions of different people looking at the same sculpture. The gestures on the faces of sculpted figures will always be the same, but the feeling they give changes according to the perception of the beholder, where s/he is looking from, how big the sculpture is, where it is standing and what it is standing next to. The fragmented narrative of *Marienbad* exposes the complicated structures of real experiences. The linear and continuous order of conventional narratives is in fact designed for us to follow and understand the stories better whereas *Marienbad* keeps the natural disorder of things at the expense of confusion and misunderstanding.

One of the ways in which discontinuity in the film is created and maintained is through repetition, a technique that disorients the viewer and prevents or delays interpretation. The repetition of the same sentences or words by different characters, the same gesture of the woman, costumes and character positioning, the same shots, framings and camera movements in different scenes remind us of other scenes and they all break conventional continuity. There are also other couples in the hotel who seem to be engaged in the same conversations as the man and the woman. This disrupts the causality and makes us question the multiplicity of the same story. The sense of repetition is evoked in terms of time as well as space. In one of the scenes,

the characters have contradictory views about the time a photograph was taken. The photograph depicts the woman in clothes that she is seen wearing during what the film presumably presents to be ‘this year’. Jacques Brunius explains this:

From the wording of the Narration, one seems to be justified in assuming that this [...] is an evocation of the preceding year (Minus One), which would mean that the photograph was not taken last year (Minus One) but two years ago (Year Minus Two) or even before (Year Minus Three), and given to her last Year (Minus One), in a previous attempt at persuasion. (1962: 125)

The fragmented nature of the film as well as the narration suggests that this is an incident that keeps repeating itself in circles in a labyrinthine time and space.

Through falling apart and resisting coherence and continuity, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* reveals the complexity pertinent to how we experience life. One of the main elements that help to build the discontinuity in *Marienbad* is the dialogue and voice-over and the film hints at their potential for multiple interpretations from the beginning. The words in the long sentences that we hear during the credits are consecutively repeated and replaced in slightly different sentences in the introductory scenes. The man's voice-over evokes a sense of *déjà vu*: the repeated words – ‘walls’, ‘sound’, ‘silent’, ‘corridors’, ‘once again’, ‘heavy’, ‘rooms’ – are important keywords that lead us through the film to our own construction of the story. Repetition and disruption have two different functions in the construction of the story. Repetition lets us notice things and prevents us from forgetting; disruption breaks the structure that repetition has prepared for us, thus blurring our memory, but at the same time forcing us to remember. The unstable structure of the narrative in *Marienbad* alternates continuously between seemingly binary pairs: acceptance and rejection, past, present and future, reality and illusion, fact and fantasy, whole and fragments. In fact, the two parts of a pair are not necessarily the opposite of each other; they are interchangeable. It is impossible to

assign a precise characteristic to a place, a person or an incident: one room might look exactly the same as the one before but turn out to be a completely different one; she may have had an affair with him or not; the photograph may have been taken last year or the year before. The words, gestures, camera movements, positions of the actors and costumes are all slightly different from and slightly similar to each other from one shot to the following one. This is how the binary pairs are established and destroyed at the same time. Repetition and disruption in the dialogue and voice-over inhibit the construction of the characters and the story; they create transiency and flow instead of completion.

The discontinuous editing in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* is also supported by *mise en scène*: the same conversation takes place with different backgrounds or between different people, or the movement of an actor in the space interferes with the continuity of a scene. The frame of reference from one scene to the other is always obscured and the reality of the film world is ambiguous and open to many interpretations. The husband is always an intruder to the conversation of the lover and the woman. In the scene where they are sitting alone together in one of the rooms, the husband comes into the frame from the dark background behind them and walks into the middle of where they are. He looks at the couple without saying a word and disappears again into the darkness. 'Who was it? Your husband? Maybe?' the man says to the woman. We do not know whether he is physically there or if this figure is just a representation of the obstruction between the couple. What *Marienbad* suggests with its style is that knowing such a fact makes no difference to our understanding of the film. The abruptness of this performance resembles the inserts in the editing and random changes in time and space from one shot to the other (such as the one discussed in Figure 2.4). Another abrupt use is a method that gives an

effect that is slightly similar to a freeze frame. Actors stop moving: we know that the time continues in the film by the slightest move of a hand, an earring swinging or the delay in one of the actors' movements. This is a frozen movement, instead of a frozen time. In these scenes, attention is directed to the silence, the distance between the actors and their occupation of space.

Just as there are interferences in movements and images, so there are pauses in the dialogues. In one of the early scenes, two men are walking in the corridor having a conversation about 'something' that froze, which is an immediate reminder of the image of people frozen in the previous scene. As they continue to talk, some of the sentences are cut out from the soundtrack: the dialogue is also frozen. There are fragments of sentences with pauses in between them: 'It's unbelievable...I don't quite remember...It must have been in '28 or '29...In the summer of '29 it froze for a week...A handsome woman...Too much imagination'.<sup>9</sup> The camera is tracking back, keeping the medium shot of the men while they are moving forward, but the conversation is not wholly audible. Their mouths are moving, but the only sound in the scene is of the music. Similarly, there are pauses in the film's diegetic sound. In one of the scenes in the garden, a group of people stand by the statue as the lover comes into the frame to say something to the woman; the voice-over continues to describe the scene, but there is silence in the background: the atmospheric sound is blocked except for presumably the sound of the running water in the garden, which we do not see. Lastly, music is paused in a similar way in a scene when an image of the garden is inserted into a scene taking place inside the hotel.

The discontinuity in the film, therefore, is multi-layered: editing, dialogue, sound, *mise en scène* are all interrupted. That is one of the reasons why the film seems to be falling apart and continuously straying away from the main point. In fact,

the main point is exactly this falling apart; it is the uncertainty between any two poles. The inability to construct a narrative is both a theme and a style that *Marienbad* explores.

The aesthetics of symmetry and the formal photographic composition of each scene are crucial elements in terms of their contribution to the story of *Marienbad*. The strict organisation of light and dark areas, and figure placement heightens the feeling of order and consequently entrapment. Opposed to the forgetfulness of the woman and the fragmented recollections of the man conveyed by the voice-over, and the abrupt editing of the scenes, are the well-organised and clear images in each shot. Order is emphasised in the shape of the garden and the interiors, the way the characters are placed in a scene and the contrast of light and dark as well as the movement or stillness of the camera. The feeling given through the image differs greatly from the feeling given through the text; only repeated words in the text are as clear as the frames of the image. In effect, the ambiguity of the sentences always contradicts the clarity of a shot. The sentences are as discontinuous as the editing in the film. While some scenes seem to provide a possibility of being reconstructed into a linear narrative, others are completely independent and self-contained. Nothing is mentioned verbally about the firearm shooting scenes, for example, (segments of which are dispersed inside the film); whether the shooting really takes place or it is a representation of the man's remembrances is ambiguous.<sup>10</sup> Although the inserts of the shooting seem to have no place in the narrative in terms of explaining some of the mysteries, they affirm and emphasise the tension between the two men: the competition is not limited to the game table; there are even guns involved.

There is a delay, a contradiction and also a resemblance between sound and image throughout the film. It is this slight difference between what is happening and



what is said that forms the essence of the narrative. Nothing is certain on the screen, which leads to questioning and falsifying each interpretation. This feeling of doubt is something that helps to make up the narrative. The delay is especially obvious in one of the scenes where the man is remembering a particular memory he had with the woman 'last year' next to the statue in the garden. She is standing against the banisters and looking down towards the garden. As he describes the way he remembers the scene, the woman moves similarly to the way he describes it, only a moment later. The contradiction and resemblance are usually in the same scene, sometimes even the same frame. Attention is drawn to those things at which the narrator or the voice-over points: anything that resembles his description is an affirmation; anything that contradicts it is disbelief and disorientation. In another scene the man and the woman are sitting in one of the rooms. They do not look at each other; the man is remembering what has happened last year and describing one of the times they met. In the middle of his dialogue, he turns his head slowly to the woman who is also looking away hypnotised and the camera follows his movement. Then his sentences continue in present tense: he describes the woman as being afraid, her mouth half open, her eyes growing bigger and she is reaching out her hand for help. None of his descriptions match what we see. The woman is frozen with a blank facial expression; it is because of his words that we might think she might be afraid or that her mouth is slightly open. As he continues talking, the camera moves slowly to her back similar to the way it moves around the sculpture in the garden. The image is never free of the voice-over; it is defined and redefined by the spoken words.

The voice-over is the main guide throughout the whole movie. It is the story of the man, told by the man. Whether the film is taking place in the future, past or present or whether this is a distorted memory or dream is not important. The voice-

over is like a loose thread that holds the disconnected images together. However, its importance is in its looseness rather than its connecting function. Even the man seems to be unsure of what took place the year before. All the characters are trapped in this time and space, including the owner of the voice who appears to be the only one in control. There is a scarcity of words that are shared by everyone; the man does not own the sentences as a narrator. Contrast in the film relies on similarities rather than differences: a camera movement, a visual composition of a frame, a room or a corridor in the hotel or fragments of dialogue can look almost the same in two different scenes; only in comparison with each other do they differ slightly, rendering any imaginary construction of a fictional or coherent world useless.

The sharp interruptions in our pre-constructed notions of time and space in *Marienbad* are unconventional discontinuities. The whole film is based on the interaction of past, present and future: we do not and can never know in which temporality a scene is taking place. The insert shots or the jumps in time and space are actually the images that are building the story; however, no reference is given as to when and where they belong. This is a narrative that does not have a chronological or logical order. The non-linearity in *Marienbad* is established mainly by editing, but it is also supported by other stylistic elements in the film. The story's features are evident in the way style is used so that the viewers are as confused as the woman who is struggling to remember. The result of such a use is puzzling and disorienting; it withholds certain information from the audiences. Contrastingly, other films that conspicuously focus on non-linearity produce different effects. Instead of digressing the viewers from the centre, they can use non-linearity as a tool to guide them through the stories or explain and underline some significant themes. A similar non-linearity exists in the next case study, *Memento*; the narratives of the two films resemble each

other, but the effects are different. By taking away all frames of references *Marienbad* succeeds in un-becoming a narrative whereas *Memento* provides a pattern for its non-linearity to be more easily followed.<sup>11</sup> The next section is going to look at *Memento* in detail to see how this patterned non-linearity functions. Does it obscure the story as in *Marienbad* or does it have a complementary effect? What differences exist between the films' non-linear narratives? The discontinuity in *Memento* is as visible as *Marienbad*'s, but can we say that it functions as an instrument of continuity?

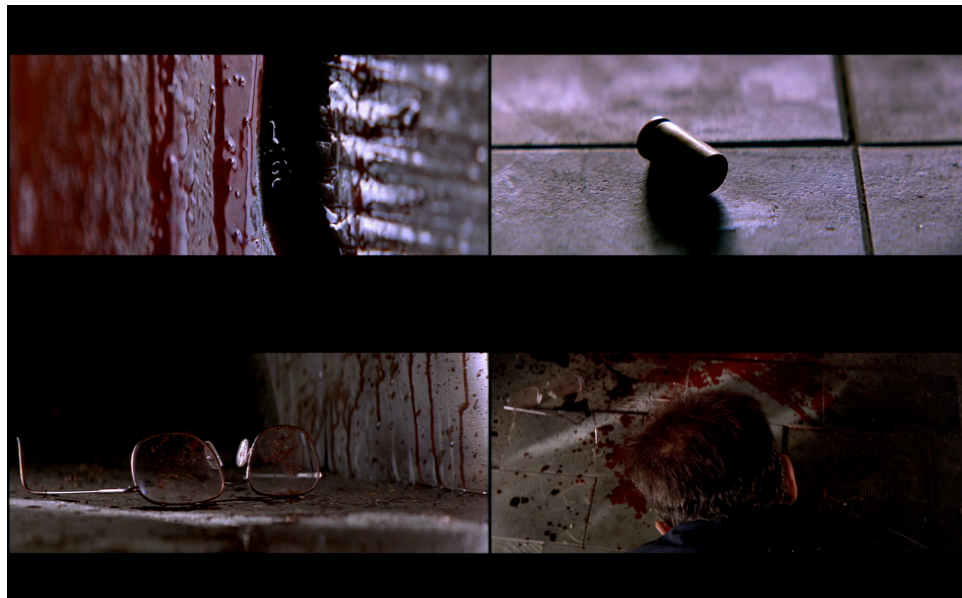
### **‘The feel of a movie’<sup>12</sup>: Functions of Non-linearity in *Memento***

One of the most popular contemporary examples of non-linear films, *Memento*, opens with the close-up of a hand holding a Polaroid picture, in which we see a man lying on the floor photographed above the waist from his back. His head rests on a pool of blood, some of which is scattered on the wall close-by (Figure 2.5). The colours of the Polaroid slowly fade away and the person holding it starts to flap it. Contrary to our expectations, the colours fade more with the flapping and



**Figure 2.5** The Polaroid

gradually the picture becomes all white. The camera now turns to show us the man who is holding the photograph; first he puts it back to the Polaroid camera, then he takes a shot. Slightly more than a minute into the opening scene, it is clear that this part is running backwards, which foreshadows the most conspicuous stylistic element used throughout the film. From this scene onwards coloured scenes will be ordered backwards while the black and white will run normally. The following shots are almost like still images: first of blood running down, then of an empty bullet shell and finally of a pair of glasses. Then there is the same dead body from the photograph, the victim, with his head resting in the same pool of blood (Figure 2.6). A gun jumps



**Figure 2.6** Shots like still images from *Memento*'s opening

up from the floor into the man's hands and all these images come to life. The blood and glasses go back to the victim, the bullet shell to the gun and with the sound of the shot, the victim is alive again. The scene cuts to black and white from here. The killer is in a hotel room now. Looking perplexed he asks himself where he is. Next starts another scene in colour, in which, surprisingly, there is the victim greeting the killer. Initially *Memento* provides no information as to where and when these scenes

are taking place and how they are linked. The film continues to switch between black and white, and coloured scenes while the audience attempts to understand the logic behind their organisation.

As in *Marienbad*, *Memento* uses non-linearity to emphasise the unreliability of memory and the interdependence of past, present and future. It is a film that also deals with issues related to time, remembrance and identity. Just as *Marienbad*'s indecisive characters are unable to remember precisely what has happened between them, so its narrative prevents us from constructing a continuity. Shot four decades later, *Memento* also tackles our process of constructing a narrative by using discontinuity and it does this in a similarly conspicuous way. What is the difference between the two films' uses of style then? What kinds of effects do these uses produce? What are their functions? Although the two films' stories and styles correspond in many ways, *Memento* is easier to understand; more questions are answered in the end. One might conclude, therefore, that the discontinuity in this film's style becomes a function of story coherence.

*Memento* succeeds in using non-linearity as a new way of storytelling and in implementing it to the story. The film's most significant feature is temporal discontinuity achieved by its unusual editing. This feature, similar to that found in earlier films such as *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and *Mystery Train* (Jim Jarmusch, 1989), influences our understanding of the causality and content of the events. If *Memento* were to be told in a linear fashion, the story would not be the same; a chronological construction would expel some things. It is useful first to look at this unconventional structure of temporality in the film in order to see the effects it has on the meaning and coherence of the story.

There are four diverse time periods in *Memento* and it is important to define and separate these periods to understand their usages. Two periods belong to the present; these form the plot duration of the film. The two others belong to the past; these are flashbacks that complete the story. The two periods belonging to the present have their partners in the past. The first storyline belonging to the present is composed of the scenes that are shot in colour, moving forwards in themselves, but in a backward order in the movie. This is what we can call the immediate present. The immediate present is arranged so that its last scene occurs at the beginning of the film and its first one at the end. This time period begins when Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), the protagonist with the memory condition, consciously decides to make Teddy (Joe Pantoliano), the undercover cop, his next John G (or his next victim). It ends when he kills Teddy at the beginning. The second period, which we can call the immediate past, is the long sequence shot in black and white and cut into segments that are interspersed into the immediate present. It begins with Leonard waking up in an anonymous motel room. He talks on the phone with someone about Sammy Jankis, an old client of Leonard's whom he claims had the same condition with him. The sequence ends when the person at the end of the line, who we later realise is Teddy, convinces him that Jimmy Grants, a local drug dealer, is his wife's murderer and gives him directions to an isolated place outside town to meet Jimmy and kill him. These two time periods merge together at the end of the movie into a common scene when the end of the immediate past is revealed to form the beginning of the immediate present. This scene, shared by both periods, is the core of the story; it is where the truth – although still partial – about Leonard and Teddy is disclosed. It is where a sense of the duration and the nature of the relationship between Teddy and

Leonard are developed. The same scene also reveals the limits of control that Leonard has over his decisions in life.

The other two time periods that belong to the past are flashbacks from the protagonist's point of view. Every point of view is biased as it asserts a direction to look from, but the fact that these flashbacks are recollections of a character with a memory condition makes them even more unreliable. One of the flashbacks comprises the story of Sammy Jankis, who was being investigated by Leonard about his memory condition for the insurance company in which Leonard worked. These scenes are shot in black and white because they form a flashback in the immediate past where Leonard explains Sammy's condition on the phone, remembering and interpreting his memories. This flashback is clear and concrete, in that it has a reasonable storyline when compared with the other one, which is composed of Leonard's momentary remembrances of his wife. This is a collection of scattered images shot in colour as he remembers them in the immediate present and it does not cohere into a meaningful scene or a temporal order.

Although these two time periods of the past look independent from each other in terms of space, time and causality, they are correlated. The spectator never gets to know whether it was Leonard's wife who had diabetes and whether it was Leonard or Sammy who was in an institution. The story of Sammy could well be a product of Leonard's memory, which revised and fictionalised his own past, assigning it to someone else. The film hints at this probability not only in the dialogue between Leonard and Teddy, but also visually, when we see Leonard sitting in the wheelchair in the institution for only five frames during one of the shots in the flashback. Leonard's remembrance of his wife is also questionable: she winks after the attack, which suggests she might have survived; she reacts to a needle shot and a pinch on

her leg in a similar way in two different shots; and in one scene Leonard lies next to her in bed with a tattoo on his chest that says 'I did it'. The last point that raises doubts about the reliability of these flashbacks is the difference between these two recollections. When recounting Sammy's story on the phone, Leonard tells it as a perfect story, including every detail needed to understand his condition and the relationship of the couple. In comparison, Leonard's wife's story is vague, not even told, but pictured in short shots, disconnected with rapid cutting. They only give the 'feel of a person' as Leonard puts it; we do not even get to know her name; she is anonymous, similar to the hotels in which Leonard wakes up.

Perhaps the most prominent stylistic usage in *Memento* is the frequent flashbacks, or rather jumps, from one time period to the other. Although this is an unconventional method of storytelling in cinema, the clear differences between the way the scenes from these different periods are framed and shot enable the viewer to recognise them easily and overcome the fast transitions. The frequency of flashbacks and their non-linear organisation in *Memento* resemble the style in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. Not surprisingly, both films deal with common themes such as memory, remembrance and subjectivity, whose representations are bound to be related to discontinuity. However, compared to *Marienbad*, the discontinuity in *Memento* is less difficult to decipher as it lays out a pattern that also illustrates the protagonist's memory problem. *Marienbad*'s narrative, on the other hand, is non-linear as well as incomplete. The flashbacks and momentarily inserted scenes are suspended in time; there is no element of certainty to validate their existence either in the past, or in the present. It could be argued that such an incoherence corresponds to the woman's uncertainty and repudiation of the events that have supposedly taken place last year. In this sense, the functions of the stylistic choices in these two films



are similar particularly in the way they influence the stories. However, *Memento* clarifies some of the holes in the story through a pattern it offers in its narrative while *Marienbad* is a unique film that dismantles its own narrative by experimenting with style. It is useful now to look at how *Memento* incorporates discontinuity in its narrative through a pattern that decreases the puzzling effects that discontinuity creates.

The abstractness of non-linearity in *Marienbad* stands for the complexity of subjectivity and experience. Although this discontinuity helps to emphasise the uncertainty of the characters and the indefiniteness of the incidents, it neither resolves itself nor explains the story. Scenes do not make up a whole; they remain as fragments by themselves. The non-linear narrative in *Memento* also explains the subjectivity of the protagonist, but unlike *Marienbad*, by reordering the intercutting of two main storylines – the immediate past and the immediate present – we can reach a conventional linear temporality in *Memento*.<sup>13</sup> When put in a linear order, the only way for the story to start is with the first scene of the black and white sequence. Leonard wakes up in a motel room; he tries to figure out where he is and briefly explains his condition through the voice-over. The phone rings and Leonard picks it up, starting to talk about Sammy Jankis' story, which is made up of the black and white flashbacks with Leonard's narration. As he speaks on the phone, we get to see how he makes the tattoos on his body and how serious his condition is; tattoos contain permanent messages, rules and advice that he unequivocally follows to make his life easier. His indecision and panic about the identity of the person at the end of the line only lasts until he forgets again. From what he hears from 'Officer Gammel', Leonard believes that he is on the right track for John G, the man who killed his wife. Following his directions, Leonard goes to kill a man in an abandoned place outside

the town and takes a photograph of his victim. At this point the film starts to fade to colour. This is where the two time periods merge, the end of the actual film, but also the knot of the plot. In the next couple of scenes, we hear from Teddy (or Officer Gammel) that killing is something Leonard repeatedly does. Before forgetting the things he said about him, Leonard consciously picks Teddy as his next victim by destroying the victim's photograph he has just taken, writing 'Don't believe his lies' at the back of Teddy's photograph and taking note of his licence plate number to make it his 'Fact 6' in the form of a tattoo.

From this point onward, if the story were to be told in a conventional linear way, we would know that Leonard is after Teddy and the clues would eventually lead to him. A coaster Leonard finds in the pocket of the suit he is wearing, which belongs to Jimmy Grants, leads him to Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss), who is supposedly Jimmy's girlfriend. Natalie uses Leonard for her own benefit while Teddy always keeps an eye on him, trying to warn him not to get too intimate with Natalie, also trying to talk him into leaving town before the police start investigating the murder. Teddy's efforts are negated every time Leonard looks at the back of his picture and sees: 'Don't believe his lies'. When Natalie traces the licence plate number that Leonard has given her, the name that comes up – not surprisingly – is John Gammel, that is, Teddy. In this order, the film would end with Leonard killing Teddy at the same place where he killed Jimmy Grants – a place mentioned to him by Natalie. This is the scene where the actual film starts.

If the scenes were in a linear chronological order, in the first part of the movie, we would learn briefly about the condition of Leonard through his behaviour, the voice-over in the hotel room, the tattoos on his body and his telling of the story of Sammy Jankis on the phone. At the end of this first part, Teddy would reveal the

truth that Lenny cannot remember killing his wife's murderer and that he does it over and over again. Lenny's reaction to this revelation is to turn Teddy into his John G. From then on, in the second part, the film would lose its tension. Once we know that Leonard is going to kill Teddy, the rest of the film would confirm Leonard's memory condition and show how people like Natalie and Teddy take advantage of that condition and the pain he goes through as he tries to forget his wife. The killer and the victim would be revealed halfway through the film, leaving us no suspense to build up towards the ending.

However, this is not what *Memento*'s story is all about. The complexity of its narrative lies in its ability to make us doubt the characters' identities and make us think about how malleable perception can be. All the characters lack crucial information that prevents us from being able to construct coherent and complete identities. When placed in a linear narrative the characters might have seemed flat, uninteresting and undeveloped. However, seeing these characters from a perspective similar to Leonard's reveals how many different interpretations can exist for each of them. The gist of the story would be incomplete if it were told chronologically.

*Memento* is not only a story about a man with a memory condition; it tackles questions of identity and memory. Construction of a complete and static identity is impossible because it is a continuous process; identity changes and is dependent on the present, which directly influences the past and the future. If we do not remember or witness a part of the reality of the present or the past, then we have a drastically different understanding of ourselves and the people around us. If we miss a crucial piece of reality, then we are also in a perfect condition to make a different or unrealistic whole out of the pieces we have. *Memento* takes a simple story about a man with a memory condition, presumably used by the police and the drug dealers to

kill people for them. The film turns it into a complicated exploration of identity and perception through the use of its unconventional non-linear narrative. Not only does it help to orient us in the temporal disorder of the story, but the narrative complements the content by underlining the point of view and the condition of the protagonist, which we take as our guide to understand the story. *Memento*'s editing is the backbone of its story; without it, characters and events would fall apart and the film would lose its interest and attraction.

Non-linearity in *Memento*, then, has several functions: it represents the way the film's protagonist experiences life. It compels the viewers to remember the previous scenes and reorganise them in order to make sense of the story. It delays the suspense in the story, which otherwise would be shared with the viewers from the start. Moreover, it does this through a pattern that the viewers can familiarise themselves with. In other words, the functions and the nature of the discontinuity in *Memento* help to complete the story. The outcome of the stylistic choices in this film is not a discontinuity effect; nevertheless there may be questions that are left unanswered. This is a discontinuity that produces continuity both through its nature that is representative of the protagonist's memory condition and through its repetitive pattern.

*Memento* deals with memory and remembrance; as a consequence temporal discontinuity is at the centre of the film and most elements of its style work to underline the existence of this discontinuity. The difference of style in the two main time periods acts primarily to stress their distinction so that the temporal discontinuity can be spotted more easily. The scenes in colour are formed of shots over Leonard's shoulder or from his back – as if following him – and many close-ups are inserted within them of photographs, places and writings. There are no scenes without

Leonard's presence. The setting is an anonymous town in which Leonard tries to find his way around. The black and white scenes on the other hand, are shot with a more mobile camera which usually frames him from the top. Apart from the final scene, the setting is Leonard's motel room, which completely involves us with the world through him; it is only Leonard that we see or hear – even with the flashbacks of Sammy. In both cases style helps to define Leonard's point of view, but the differences in style primarily help the spectator to distinguish between the two temporalities to construct continuity, thus emphasising the non-linear narrative. *Memento's* style forms a part of its story: the question of temporal discontinuity. For Leonard, discontinuity is continuity. The importance of the story is not the puzzle it is offering; it is not trying to find an answer to who the villain was. It is the process it makes us go through with non-linearity: everything we firmly believe to be true can be invalidated with new knowledge.

*Memento's* non-linear narrative requires scrutiny and involvement with it. Unlike the conventional usage of continuity editing, which allows the audience to follow the narrative as it develops, without demanding detailed awareness of its structure, this non-linear style manifests its existence as a complement to the story from the beginning of the film. The audience needs to remember and reorder each scene – just as Lenny has to – to make them cohere into a meaningful story. With this style, more attention to each individual scene is demanded. In the documentary, *Anatomy of a Scene*, Christopher Nolan explains that the way to 'give the audience the experience of not being able to remember things' is to 'withhold the information from the audience that is withheld from the protagonist'.<sup>14</sup> This is how he came up with the idea of the backwards structure of the film. In trying to convey the protagonist's character in a film, one of the ways is to let it reveal itself through the

style, with the use of acting, the cinematography or the editing. Along with other stylistic elements, Nolan does this especially with the non-linear structure. We are put into the situation in which we strive to remember ‘what has happened’ in trying to figure out ‘what is happening now’. The first three scenes, as most members of the crew mention in the same documentary, almost act like instructions or cues for the audience to read the unconventional editing. From then on, the scenes in the immediate present are constructed in such a way that the initial shot of the previous scene, is the ending of the following one. Once one realises this pattern, it becomes inevitable to connect it with Leonard’s condition. As Noël Carroll observes, ‘*Memento* not only makes us conscious of our participation in the construction of the narrative, however, it also alerts us to the way in which we follow the story by foregrounding [...] the process by which we assemble a story out of the discourse’ (2009: 138). We construct a story out of every narrative, but we are rarely aware of this process and how we contribute to this construction. *Memento* emphasises the significance of this contribution, as the story is not complete without it.

Editing, then, is the most conspicuous element that complements the theme of discontinuity in the film. Other stylistic elements also conventionally supplement the content, but remain less obvious than the editing. The inserts of sudden short shots of Leonard’s wife into the scenes, the use of Polaroid photographs and incomplete sentences as notes and tattoos, the anonymity of locations, the flatness of the characters and the repeated dialogue all serve to highlight the main themes of temporal discontinuity and the refusal of a unique identity construction. Everything is in bits and pieces and the information given to us is only sufficient to make a partial truth out of what we see. If we were to learn more about Natalie’s relationship with her boyfriend or Teddy’s past as a police officer or whether Leonard really lost his

wife, it would certainly make a difference in our understanding of the story.

However, filling these gaps would not make the story more continuous or coherent as this is not what the film is about. The non-linear narrative in *Memento* maintains the feeling of doubt: the past is not something to depend on; nor is the present because they interact with each other to form an always-changing perception of identity. The structure of editing in *Memento* complements the story of the film and it is the only way to let us experience Leonard's point of view and condition, rather than showing or telling it through dialogue and action. The obvious use of non-linearity in *Memento* is not only an effect to develop tension; nor is it simply used to create something unconventional: this style is a part of the narrative of the film as it helps us understand the whole.

*Memento* violates both narrative and visual continuity, which puts it under one of the categories of discontinuity that Andràs Bálint Kovács calls radical discontinuity. There are extensive and indefinite lapses of time and space between adjacent scenes, as well as shifts in the visual texture. *Marienbad*, on the other hand, is a visually continuous film with a discontinuous narrative that is created by an unusually circular conception of time. As Kovács notes, 'The only discernible time [in the film] is the time of this continuous flow, which is basically the time of the screening' (2007: 131). In theory, violating continuity on both levels, *Memento* is seemingly a more puzzling film than *Marienbad*, which is visually continuous. However, the result is different. As discussed in the previous sections, *Marienbad* leaves numerous questions unanswered whereas the mystery in *Memento* is almost totally solved. *Marienbad* disturbs any attempts to form a continuity while *Memento* sticks to certain principles in its visual organisation for the audience to follow. It is useful here to look at in what ways the narrative and visual choices in these two films

coincide and how they differ from one another so that we can understand how discontinuity functions differently in the two films.

Both *Marienbad* and *Memento* have non-linear narratives and this is their most visible and their principal commonality. They make use of discontinuity by disregarding the narrative unity of time, space and causality in one way or another and there are similarities in their uses. Both films' stories have characters that have trouble remembering and non-linearity is used as a tool to emphasise their situations. The primary agents that create this non-linearity are the flashbacks, whose functions have shifted from their conventional usage. In *Marienbad*, for instance, flashbacks entangle causality. Comparing the flashbacks in *Marienbad* to those in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), *Lola Montès* (Max Ophüls, 1955) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), Labarthe suggests that

the function of the flashback is no longer to efface the discontinuity of the narrative. I would even go so far as to say the opposite. Of course the old function still persisted under the new: the flashback still served the story. It was still the sign of a desire to inject meaning since it was linked to a chronology. In *Marienbad* that sign disappears in turn. (1986: 56)

As Labarthe observes, the non-linear storylines formed of flashbacks in these three films do not conceal discontinuity, yet they help to create meaning in the stories. In this sense, *Marienbad*'s difference lies in its taking this style of discontinuity to such an extreme that it is impossible either to fill in the blanks or to reorder the pieces into a conventional continuity. Instead of providing the missing pieces in the puzzle, flashbacks in *Marienbad* create more gaps in causality. Meanwhile in *Memento*, the flashbacks still maintain the function of serving continuity; they are just not in a conventional order and frequency. Although the narrative constantly switches between different time periods, through the use of colour and alternate turns, the film's structure can be more easily followed.



*Memento*'s flashbacks can be defined by their systematical use throughout the film. In Roy Armes's words, sometimes there can be no 'external frame of reference' in successive shots, which creates confusion due to missing links (1968: 112). Armes uses this term to compare the structure of flashbacks in *Marienbad* with the waltz scene in *Madame de...* (Max Ophuls, 1953), but it is useful to explain the flashbacks in *Memento* also. Armes writes about the difference in how changes in time are depicted. In the extended waltz scene in *Madame de...*, for instance, costumes and settings change while Madame de (Danielle Darrieux) and the Baron (Vittorio de Sica) continue to dance to similar music in similar rooms. There is always a frame of reference that we can rely on and that allows us to understand that time is passing. A similar technique is used in the breakfast scene with Kane (Orson Welles) and his wife (Ruth Warrick) in *Citizen Kane*: an extended conversation between them on the breakfast table portrays changes in their marriage through the way they sit, their costumes, choice of words, the way they look at each other and the way they look away. If we compare these examples with the first examples from *Marienbad* discussed earlier in this chapter, the difference will be clear. In one of the common scenes in the films, the man proposes to show the woman around and the next shot shows the couple dancing (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The external frames of reference are withheld except for the man's hand gesture. As discussed in detail in the previous section, *Marienbad* transforms the nature of classical flashbacks by withholding information about time and space; thus, each shot seems successively independent of the other and can be dislocated. In *Memento*, this unconventional use of flashbacks also exists, but it does not disrupt the continuity. The frame of reference may not be an element that exists in two successive scenes such as a location, a gesture or an object. Instead, the patterns that are given from the start, such as the alternating time

periods, their colour and framing, operate as frames of reference, enabling easier orientation to the narrative. The differences between the two time periods are kept constant throughout the film. The black and white sequence is clearly distinguished from the colour sequence by the use of the hand-held camera, rapid editing and the choice of a confined location. Moreover, in order to make it easier for the audience to follow the reverse order of scenes in the colour sequence each scene usually starts and ends with an audiovisual mark, such as a character entering a place and calling out another character's name or slamming a door.

*Marienbad* uses no such marks; the narrative alternates between different time periods, but without any restoration of continuity. Flashbacks lose their conventional functions of filling in the blanks by providing information about time, space and causality. Most of the time, the film cuts back from one scene to another and we assume it is a flashback because of something said or described in the voice-over or dialogue. However, when there is a cut back from this deformed flashback – or a jump in time – what we had taken to be the present now appears to be the past. The voice-over belongs to the same person, which makes it easier for us to rely on it, no matter how fragmented or contradictory his sentences might be. Setting transforms while the voice-over flows. Costumes and setting warn us that there is no sense in trying to re-order the scenes into a linear narrative. In other words, in *Marienbad*, there is no strict pattern such as the use of black and white against colour in *Memento*, which clearly helps to distinguish time periods.

Although the non-linear narratives of these two films resemble one another, their effects are different. The repetitive backwards pattern in *Memento* creates an order that weakens the film's discontinuous nature, no matter how different this order looks from conventional continuity. This pattern is a representation of how the film's

protagonist behaves, which ultimately gives meaning to its presence. Same thing can be said for *Marienbad* because the non-linearity represents the clashing viewpoints of the man and the woman who remember and refuse ‘last year’ respectively. However this representation has no explanation as in the previous example. Non-linearity in this film is a disorderly flow of things that stand for the bits of memories in the characters’ unconsciousness. The fragmented structure of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* can also be studied among these films as it also presents us with a non-linear narrative in which several different time periods exist. The story in the film is again told in the form of numerous flashbacks and the temporal, causal and spatial frames of references do not always exist. Just like the non-linear narrative in *Memento* copies the manner of its protagonist’s memory condition, in *Eternal Sunshine*, the fragmented narrative is actually something the protagonist experiences in the reality of the filmic world. There are no sets of distinguished marks for the different time periods in *Eternal Sunshine*, and the transition from one to the other is not always clear. However, the film uses other ways to keep the viewer orientated. The following section will look at this film in detail to illustrate a different use of discontinuity and the purposes it serves.

### **‘It’s all being wiped away’<sup>15</sup>: Fragmented Structure in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind***

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* tells the story of two lovers who have recently broken up, Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet), through a memory-erasing process that Joel undergoes in order to forget her and the memories of their past relationship. After accidentally finding out that Clementine has had her memories erased, Joel visits the specialist who performs this procedure and decides to

do the same. While engineers are erasing his memories in his sleep, he re-experiences his past with Clementine in a state between dreaming and remembering and he semi-consciously tries to resist this erasure. Although the memory erasure is successfully completed, in the end, Joel and Clementine meet again, as if instinctively, without any knowledge of their shared past. This brief introduction explains the film's story chronologically, but as stated above, the film is told through the memory erasure itself, which gives it a fragmented structure formed of loosely connected flashbacks and flashforwards, a structure that inhibits the discovery of missing pieces in between. The opening scene is a good example that lays out the formal characteristics of this fragmented structure.

The film starts with Joel waking up on a Valentine's Day and deciding impulsively to catch the train to Montauk instead of going to work. He comes across the same woman in several places: on the beach, at a diner and finally on the train. Thus, Joel and Clementine meet, enjoy each other's company and decide to go out on another date. The morning after they spend their next date together on the frozen Charles River, when Joel is dropping Clementine to her house, she asks to stay with him and goes out to get her toothbrush. Although told briefly through short instances, up until this moment, we see how their relationship advances chronologically and in a happy mode. From the shot where Joel is waiting for Clementine, the film suddenly cuts to a gloomy moment without prior indications for the audience. More than 17 minutes into the film, the credits start running to the sound of Beck's 'Everybody's gotta learn sometime'. It is night now and Joel is driving on dark streets. He weeps and sobs and throws an audiotape out of the car window. This swift change of atmosphere is seemingly connected to the previous scenes, which prepare us to assume that this moment must belong to a time in the future and Joel is crying

because the couple have split up. The depictions of a beginning and an ending of a relationship in the opening sequence make it inevitable to link these scenes together. In fact, these two time periods are in reverse order. The latter scene belongs to the time before Joel has erased Clementine right after the end of their first relationship and the former scenes depict the present when both characters are free of each other's memories and meeting again. Although the night scene comes after the day ones, suggesting a continuity, it takes place in the past and even indicates a different relationship because Joel and Clementine are two strangers now. This abrupt jump in time is not explained in the opening sequence and it is not clarified until the end of the film. What is more confusing is that following this scene, we see Joel enter his building, talk to his neighbour and go to sleep after taking some pills. Men whom we later understand to be the engineers come into his flat and set up things. While Joel is on the bed, voices and images become blurry as if to suggest that he is falling into a deep sleep. The sudden cut thereafter to a conversation with his friends about the way Clementine ignored him in the book store is another flashback, only this time Joel is already in the process of memory erasure; therefore what we see is neither a dream nor a memory and it neither belongs to the future nor the past. Again, we are able to identify the temporal order of this flashback a couple of scenes later, only after we realise that we are in fact going back in time with Joel as he re-visits his memories of Clementine.

*Eternal Sunshine* is about Joel going through a memory erasure procedure; following his protagonist, the film uses the mode in which he experiences this procedure to depict the relationship between the two main characters. Memory erasure is the central topic in the narrative as well as a storytelling tool, which provides an alternative way of perceiving the changing nature of experience and the

self in time.<sup>16</sup> There are no distinctions between the scenes of memory, dream and reality in which Joel wanders about. In addition to this, the scenes that take place outside of the memory erasure have no indications of what belongs where; past, present and future are mixed up. In this highly intertwined setting, the storyline generally follows Joel and witnesses events from his point of view, which constantly keeps shifting from remembrance to imagination, and from present day to childhood. Needless to say, all the stylistic elements work to create this fragmented atmosphere, which is the setting of the filmic world as well as a storytelling device.

As the discussion of the opening scene exemplifies, *Eternal Sunshine's* stylistic choices create complex temporal, spatial and causal relationships between scenes; they do not, at least initially, provide decipherable transitions. The film's editing, combined with its use of sound, special effects and cinematography, helps to maintain discontinuity. The result requires attention from the audience as there are no clear patterns to follow except for the memory-trip, which Joel leads and which is made up of highly subjective, unexpected and unclear moments. Joel's actions and decisions connect one scene to another as he travels between them and through time. For Joel's memory-trip begins not only with his most recent memories but also with those that are bitterest. The film does not assign an exact time and place to these memories, but they are to some extent in reverse chronological order. As the memory erasure proceeds, Joel becomes aware of what is happening to him and tries to stop it. Therefore, added to the reverse order are irrelevant moments from Joel's childhood that he compulsorily remembers in order to mislead the designed memory-trip that his brain is ordered to make. Consequently, the film's structure becomes more puzzling and the links between scenes become harder to construct. One sequence starts with Clementine and Joel talking under a blanket in bed as she explains to him an intimate

secret about herself. Next we see two of them walking on the frozen Charles River followed by a shot from above framing them lying on ice as they hold each other's hands. Joel says: 'I could die right now Clem. I am just happy'. As Clementine turns to hug him, the space turns into a busy hall, which we will associate later with a train station in a following scene. Clementine seems to be frozen in the pose and her eyes are fixed. Joel whispers her name and she starts sliding away from him on the ground, disappearing into the dark among the walking people in the hall. Joel is now back on ice again as he looks up and screams that he wants to 'call it off'. Shots of the present time are inserted within his cries, in which we see him attached to the memory machine sleeping on the bed and next to him are the two memory workers dancing to a rock song (Figure 2.7). The shots up to this point are loosely connected and it is difficult to pinpoint what belongs where: Where and when were they lying



**Figure 2.7** Loosely connected shots in Joel's memory/dream

under the blanket? When did they go to the frozen river? What does the station signify in their relationship, if it is a station? Moreover, because Joel is in a state between dreaming and remembering, it is not for certain whether they lived these moments. Sound is a device used most to signal the peculiarity of the transitions between these shots. First it slowly starts to distort, then it mixes with the background noise and finally includes the sound of the hard rock music coming from the real world.

The sequence continues as Clementine reappears lying on ice, fixed in the same position. Joel hurriedly takes her by the hand and they start running. From here onwards, the shots become shorter and more complex, containing images that are difficult to recognise temporally, spatially and causally. We see Joel working on a watercolour painting of Clementine in a skeleton costume. Next is Joel jumping on a bed in fast motion and Clementine playing the piano. Another brief shot is of the two of them in a movie theatre and one is in a train station. They finally arrive at Dr. Mierzwiak's office but Joel still cannot find a way to stop the memory erasing procedure. The office is dark; the characters have distorted voices and disfigured or blurry faces because they also belong to his memory/dream. The sequence ends at the Charles River again. But this time the two people lying on ice are Clementine and her new boyfriend Patrick. Their pose is exactly the same as the previous pose we have



**Figure 2.8** Same pose on the Charles River



seen (Figure 2.8). Moreover, Patrick recites the same sentence that Joel said to Clementine before: 'I could die right now Clem. I am just happy'. In other words, this is the present time again and we get to understand how Patrick is using old diaries he has stolen from Joel in order to catch Clementine's attention. This sequence includes moments from past, present, memory and dream and uses them freely, without any straight explanations. The only constant is the fact that Joel is in a memory-erasing trip and all the things unexplained are in fact unexplainable to him too. The memory trip is designed for the audience from Joel's viewpoint and the subjectivity of this viewpoint inhibits the descriptions of possibly significant moments of their relationship such as the watercolour painting or the train station mentioned above. In Joel's linear chase, there are same (or similar) objects and instances like these, to which a strict temporal or spatial reference cannot be attributed, such as the 'playing dead' game or the mug with Clementine's picture.

As shown above, there are distinct realities in *Eternal Sunshine*, dreams, memories and the present, but hardly any marks distinguish them. Past, present and future sometimes co-exist; sometimes they alternate; in both cases they do so without any noticeable transitions. Joel re-lives his memories while he is asleep, re-experiencing them in the form of a dream. He is semi-conscious and not in complete control of what is happening. The fragments of the past are incorporated in these sleep scenes while he is living them in the present. However, what we take as the present, the film's linear narrative, is also in disorder as it starts in the future when Joel and Clementine meet for, presumably, the second time. Moreover, some of these individual scenes in the present, which do not belong to Joel's memories or dreams, are also fragmented within themselves. The setting is unusual and perplexing as the spatial coordinates may change in the same shot; images or voices may blur or fade

away; details of previous or following scenes may die out or (re)appear. All the things that compose a scene and that are usually taken as constants – such as locations, costumes or time – can transform. This is similar to the way past and present are simultaneously depicted in *Memento* and *Marienbad*. The main difference in *Eternal Sunshine* is that different time periods can co-exist even within a single scene. In the opening sequence, for instance, we see Joel entering the house on the beach. Clementine has not appeared yet and we do not know that this is a location special to them. Although no information has been provided about the character and the location, there is the sound of Clementine's soft whisper upon Joel's entrance to the house. This sound is a mystery for us and for Joel too: as much as we are new to this story, Joel's memory is devoid of any associations with the sound and space here. The different realities of different times are blended and preserved simultaneously in this scene, especially using mismatching sound. The fragmented structure of the opening is similar to the way the sleep sequences are constructed. Stylistic choices do not change drastically in order to distinguish between different realities; the uses of hand-held camera and jump-cuts are similar. The way Joel and Clementine are filmed on the train back to New York from the beach is very fragmented in the sense that framing and angles shift constantly, giving the scene a dreamy and unsettled feel. These scenes are not included as part of Joel's sleep, but visually they are not completely separated.

The narrative of *Eternal Sunshine* is structured in such a way that even if all the given information is put together, the story of Joel and Clementine remains incomplete. Not only do the scenes resist forming an order, they create contradictions. In one of the early scenes that takes place after Clementine leaves Joel, he follows her in a car. The buildings on the street are collapsing one by one as

part of the memory erasure. Joel is conscious; he shouts ‘Look at it out here, it’s all falling apart. I am erasing you and I’m happy’. He gets out of the car to follow Clem, but turns around to notice that she is walking in the other direction. Joel can also hear the memory engineers talking in the room where he is sleeping; hearing the name of one of the engineers, Patrick (Elijah Wood), triggers him to suspect whether he is the same Patrick that Clementine has kissed in the bookstore at the beginning of the film. This is neither a memory nor a dream; we cannot know for sure whether Joel went after her in reality or spoke to her while he was driving. The scene that takes place in Joel’s living room while Joel and Clementine eat Chinese food and watch television is also exemplary of this condition. Joel hears the voices outside and tries to make sense of what is happening. Marks related to space and time – the furniture, the TV programme, the walls – are slowly being erased together with Clementine’s voice and image. Because Joel wants to stop the procedure, the narrative becomes a chase where he takes Clementine to his deepest (or perhaps least remembered) memories. They end up in the house where Joel grew up. Both of them are around the age of four now, playing in front of the house. However, the scene abruptly changes as what we see next is the four-year-old Joel being played by Jim Carrey and Clementine plays the role of a close friend of Joel’s mother. Adult Clementine and Joel interfere with the authenticity of the memory, making it mix with fantasy, dream and perhaps other memories.

This intertwined nature of time in *Eternal Sunshine* is further emphasised with the use of unconventional flashbacks that depict the past without actually cutting to another moment back in time. The transient nature of memory/dreams allows the scenes to loosen their established notions of time, space and causality. Chris Norris draws attention to this referring to an unusual scene in the film:

Lying drugged in bed, Joel looks over toward what should be his apartment wall and sees an earlier scene from the movie playing there – almost literally through a glass darkly [...] Gondry has found a new visual language for flashback here [...] The conventional mode for rendering this would be some kind of multiple exposure, which has lost its magic as surely as have blue screen, CGI morphing, and other techniques that a toddler would now read as Special Effect. (2004: 21)

As Norris observes, the stylistic conventional equivalents in this scene would perhaps be dissolves, superimposed titles or fade-ins, all of which blatantly mark absences,



**Figure 2.9** Joel sees a previous scene from the film on his wall

inform us about what we will not be seeing and even provide us with clues to locate the scene in a proper place in the linear order of the narrative (Figure 2.9). *Eternal Sunshine* conversely and self-consciously leaves absences as they are, but this confusion and lack of knowledge are crucial in constructing the narrative that emphasises the impossibility of total construction.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the film not only changes the nature of flashbacks, but also their function. The unconventional use of flashbacks was discussed in the previous sections as they also existed in *Memento* and *Marienbad*. The constant jumps in time in *Marienbad* do not even allow us to call them flashbacks as there is never a ‘time zero’ established. In *Memento*, jumps in time are similarly frequent; however, the distinguishing colour between the two time periods make it possible for viewers to recognise when the scene is taking place. *Eternal Sunshine* succeeds in including these jumps within a single scene. Although some images in these intertwined scenes are impossible to decipher, the knowledge of

being inside a memory trip prompts us to follow Joel who provides some explanations. In *Marienbad*, flashbacks produce more questions; in *Memento* flashbacks represent the way its protagonist experiences remembering; in *Eternal Sunshine*, flashbacks create absences and puzzles, which recall the way memory and dream functions.

Discontinuity is a carefully utilised tool in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, in that it forms a significant part of the narrative. The disconnected scenes never cohere to make a whole; the narrative is a puzzle with missing and misplaced pieces. However, this fragmented nature is part of the filmic world. The blanks remain blank, but there is neither a desire nor a necessity to fill them in. The narrative is composed of these fragments with their absent accompaniments, which are presented in an episodic structure; the scenes are in disorder and reordering them will not eliminate the gaps. However, this does not disrupt engagement with the narrative; rather it completes it and directs us to construct a whole.<sup>18</sup> Instead of generating multiple interpretations, this fragmentation leads to a more direct meaning with a fewer number of ways of reading. One of the reasons why the discontinuity in *Eternal Sunshine* is less puzzling than we might expect is because of the way in which the story incorporates this discontinuity into its subject matter. *Eternal Sunshine* takes place on Valentine's Day, 2004 in a fantasy version of New York where people can have their unwanted memories erased. In addition to this science-fictional element, the style, dominated by the interspersion of disconnected flashbacks in time and space, gives a semi-surreal feel to the setting. *Eternal Sunshine* depicts a world where there is a process called 'memory erasure'; people have the opportunity to forget and the possibility to continue experiencing the same things forever. Fragmentation, therefore, is a continuity in the reality of the filmic world. The film's

style mirrors its narrative; it does not provide us with the events in a linear structure. The details of Joel and Clementine's relationship are less crucial than the fact that it has transformed in time. Discontinuity is the subject of *Marienbad* as well; the film's major theme is the incapacity and denial of remembering, which leaves us with fragments and moments of the past. However, *Marienbad* leaves discontinuity as it is, intermingling at least two different subjectivities without attempting to explain which belongs where. Discontinuity is what best describes Leonard's condition in *Memento* and Joel's trip in *Eternal Sunshine*, but these films put an order to their storytelling. In other words, it is discontinuity that they want to convey and any signposts and patterns make it easier for the audiences to follow it.

By taking the memory erasure process at the centre of the film, *Eternal Sunshine* makes a claim about perception and existence in time.<sup>19</sup> The fragmented nature of the narrative is what Gondry is pointing at. Absence and fragmentation are among the central themes that the film uses to delineate the impact of past and future on the present. At any certain point in time, only the present is clear, and all fragmented memories transform, albeit slightly, in the next present. Gilles Deleuze explains this phenomenon by using Bergson's ideas on memory. For Deleuze, the past is 'preserved in time'; it should not to be confused with our remembrance of it. He describes memory as something that constantly changes in time and writes that

Depending on the nature of the recollection that we are looking for, we have to jump into a particular circle. It is true that these regions (my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life, etc.), appear to succeed each other. But they succeed each other only from the point of view of former presents which marked the limit of each of them. They coexist, in contrast, from the point of view of the actual present which each time represents their common limit or the most contracted of them. What Fellini says is Bergsonian: 'We are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity.' What happens when we search for a recollection? We have to put ourselves into the past in general, then we have to choose between the regions: in which one do we think that the recollection is hidden, huddled up waiting for us and evading us? (It is a friend from childhood or youth, from school or the army...?) We have to jump into a chosen region,

even if we have to turn to the present in order to make another jump, if the recollection sought for gives no response and does not realize itself in a recollection-image. These are the paradoxical characteristics of a non-chronological time: the pre-existence of a past in general; the coexistence of all the sheets of the past; and the existence of a most contracted degree. (2000: 99)

Since we cannot comprehend the future before it arrives and we cannot precisely predict the consequences of our actions, any time and experience we will have is unknown and undefined. Similarly, the past gradually decays into something unknown and undefined; memories are reshaped through the repetition of their recollections. Deleuze argues that this conception can be found in *Citizen Kane*. The film investigates the impossibility of knowing a man's life entirely; it does this through the presentation of memories of the people in Kane's life. The past will always be fragmented and contradictory. The revelation of the meaning of Rosebud does not complete the story because Rosebud can have an infinite amount of associations attached to it. The question asked in the first place is already misleading; 'What is Rosebud?' and its answer produce more questions, which lead to absence rather than a whole. The fragmented narrative in *Citizen Kane*, therefore, underlines the incompleteness of the life story, which depends on the changing nature of a memory in time as well as the existence of multiple viewpoints of the same experience. *Eternal Sunshine* pursues a similar question except that it gives the opportunity to its protagonist to re-experience the memories. Even though these are Joel's own memories, there are multiple viewpoints, of past, present and future, incorporated in them. His subjectivity is unbalanced and fragmented. The film celebrates the idea of not knowing the future and the idea of a distorted past as an essence of the human condition; one of the themes it explores is the impossibility to own and control life. The conjunction of past, present and future is not only unique to remembrance; it exists in each passing moment. The film depicts this through the

extreme subjectivity of its protagonist's changing point of views; the intensity of each memory encounter is due to the concurrence of various temporal, spatial and causal marks and durations assigned to each moment in the different times it was remembered.

## **Conclusion**

Films that challenge conventional storytelling techniques are often defined and understood against a group of criteria that have little relevance to these works. The stylistic characteristics of directors or periods that these films belong to are identified as being against the norm, that is, non-linear, abstract or discontinuous, and this identification largely reduces the essence, intention and richness of these films. Conventional techniques primarily develop from an aspiration to maintain a linear and continuous narrative that works together with and stays within the borders of the constructed reality of the filmic world, but not all films that are described as being non-conventional give up this aspiration. The history of cinema presents us with a range of films whose intention is not always to contradict these techniques but to offer an alternative to them. Furthermore, there are many conventional films that make use of discontinuity to stretch the limits of conventions. It is equally erroneous to argue that there is no narrative, for instance, in modernist avant-garde films, as it is to argue that popular cinema is predominantly a narrative medium. When discussing a film narrative, one should include film style, and vice versa. Discontinuous narratives or abstract filmic worlds are, therefore, not always unconventional.

In all three films analysed in this chapter, style and subject are matched; the inconsistent and unreliable experiences and subjectivities of the protagonists are explored mostly through the films' non-linear narratives. These films have memory



among their central themes, whose representation requires discontinuity and absence. *Eternal Sunshine*'s non-linear structure in fact represents the journey that Joel experiences in his memory/dream while *Memento*'s stands for Leonard's memory condition. One could argue that *Marienbad*'s structure also reflects the woman's refusal and the man's desire to remember. Moreover, the tension and the difference between their standpoints create the tangled order in the narrative that renounces agreement. However, *Marienbad* stands out from the other two examples as having an indecipherable storyline. While *Marienbad* has no comprehensible pattern or order to follow, *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine* utilise these things to lessen the puzzlement their non-linearity produces and to lead to an understanding of their stories. In other words, the function of discontinuity in these two contemporary examples is not to disrupt; on the contrary, it is to orient the viewers.

This function of discontinuity is most obvious in *Memento*, as there is a visual pattern that is immediately and easily noticed. The non-linear narrative has an order: the chronologically arranged black and white scenes take place in the past while the colour scenes in reverse make up the future. Although nothing becomes clear until the very end when the future and present meet, we can grasp the logical order of things in the story. In *Eternal Sunshine*, fragmentation has an explanation in the sense that it stands for the memory trip. Yet, unlike *Memento*, there is no pattern in the disorder of the editing that creates fragmentation and it is not always possible to categorise a scene according to the time to which it belongs. Distinctions between past, present and future are less transparent; the film jumps backwards or forwards in time without our immediate understanding. The time in which some scenes take place become clear only at the end of the film. *Marienbad*, on the other hand, has a structure similar to both of these films, but there are absolutely no indications about

how to follow its story and make sense of it. There is no linearity of time, space and causality at any moment and this is the film's central focus. Discontinuity in this film's style produces a discontinuity effect. The more the viewers try to make sense out of the successive scenes, the more they fall into the loophole that the scenes form. The discontinuity in the two contemporary examples is orderly and systematical. Moreover, it has an obvious meaning in the stories. All these transform the function of discontinuity and it no longer breaks the stories apart but rather enriches them.

In all these films, unconventional editing is the most conspicuous quality. Switching between different time periods, all make use of flashbacks, redefining their common purpose of providing the facts that are missing from the present storyline. If information about when, where and why a scene is taking place is not revealed to us, then an adjacent flashback no longer operates in relation to the preceding scene. In *Marienbad*, due to our limited knowledge about people, places and incidents, we cannot even label any scenes as flashbacks; we can only assume that they belong to another time. Through its use of flashbacks, *Memento* defines two main time periods without stating which one follows the other. As they continue in their own timeline, they become a flow of two different narratives whose temporal, spatial and causal characteristics are fully revealed in the end. Flashbacks in *Eternal Sunshine* create the surreal mood of the memory-trip. Instead of making links and references, they disassemble scenes and help to produce a more fragmented structure of independent scenes. The main difference between *Marienbad* and the contemporary examples, then, is that discontinuity in the former complicates the story whereas in the latter examples it amalgamates the dispersed pieces. This is, needless to say, due to the differences in the nature of discontinuity in these films.

As discussed in detail throughout this chapter, the function of flashbacks (and flashforwards) in *Marienbad* is to confuse the viewer and turn the narrative into a loop; in *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine*, this function shifts. Omissions of information do not affect the overall structure; we can form a chronological and causal chain of events, even if it is incomplete. Moreover, the lack of temporal, spatial and causal specificity in most scenes contributes to our following the narrative, directing attention to details. If the films were to present events in a linear order with conventional flashbacks, *Memento* would lose most of its suspense and *Eternal Sunshine* would resemble a familiar romantic comedy structure. However, their form transforms and distinguishes the content matter, turning the films into critical inquiries about time, experience and subjectivity. The films' narratives are possible and complete only with their style.

The opening scenes of *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine* are fitting examples to explain differences in nature of discontinuity. If we recall the analyses of these two films in previous sections, *Memento*'s opening is almost like a guide for the viewers about how to make sense of the film's non-linearity. Although *Eternal Sunshine* leaves the audience in puzzlement as it makes a sudden jump in time between scenes, once we understand the memory erasure, that sudden jump no longer feels like a mystery. Alternatively, in *Marienbad*, the opening scene is not particular in offering a visual guide; any of its scenes including the opening would exemplify the chaos that non-linearity creates. In *Eternal Sunshine* and *Memento*, the puzzlement only remains until the viewer is able to connect the scenes together, whereas in *Marienbad*, it prevails even after multiple viewings. The former films provide the audience with clues and a pattern to follow; discontinuity works as an organising system. The latter lets its narrative flow freely and discontinuity digresses the audience from forming a

coherent story. Style in *Eternal Sunshine* and *Memento* develops like a narrative; following style leads to a better understanding of the films.<sup>20</sup>

The intention of this thesis is to outline some of the ways in which we can define discontinuity and discuss its function in film narrative and style. This chapter focused on non-linear narratives and aimed to analyse their functions and effects. The three case analyses present different ways non-linear narratives are used. The contemporary films included in this chapter are exemplary of how discontinuity in films can have diverse functions. They integrate such uses into the continuity of the story, eliminating the effect of a break or a disruption. Discontinuity becomes a central thematic and stylistic element in the film on which the story is built. The repetition of an aberrant use of style perhaps affects our understanding of the story. Once the use becomes more noticeable, it is likely that it becomes an important factor in the story itself. When non-linear narratives exist in conjunction with relevant subjects, they can produce continuity. Especially if there is a pattern, a method or sign-posts for the audience, they work to seam the narrative pieces rather than the opposite.

This chapter looked at the most obvious cases of discontinuity: non-linear narratives. *Marienbad*, *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine* are all highly stylised films that manifest their non-linear nature immediately from the start. The intention of the chapter was to introduce the concept of discontinuity in films further through these examples that readily point to their discontinuous forms. The next chapters are going to broaden the subject by calling attention to other types of discontinuity and discussing what functions they bear.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the literature review in the Introduction for the body of work that study these films.

<sup>2</sup> A sentence repeated several times by the film's female protagonist.

<sup>3</sup> The setting in *Marienbad* and the constant disorientation caused by its style initiate the same feeling of repetition and entrapment that is inherent in the lithographs of M C Escher, made during the same period. Escher was interested in the mathematical structure of the Möbius band and the possibilities that it can offer in his graphical work. *Ascending and Descending* (1960) and *Waterfall* (1961) are two well-known examples.

<sup>4</sup> Another Resnais film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), borrows characteristics of neo-realism and it has many influences on *Marienbad*. In *Hiroshima* there are three stories, one belonging to the present: the relationship between the man and the woman; two belonging to the past: one is the woman's memory and the other is the collective memory of the war. Although this film is far less stylised and complicated than *Marienbad*, there are still ambiguities and blanks in the structure. Style is used to emphasise the impact of memory of war on the woman: the reality of the present is continuously disrupted by the images of the past. The present is not free of the memory that she refuses to confront. The archive footage and the realistic representations of the war are contrasted with her remembrances. The film alternates between an objective realism and a subjective one. But in *Hiroshima*, there is a linear main storyline. Resnais famously uses a similar style in *Muriel* (1963), *La Guerre est finie* (1966) and *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968).

<sup>5</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that Jacques Lacan presented the concept of The Mirror Stage for the first time in *Marienbad* at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Psychoanalytical Association Conference held there in 1936. For an exploration of the construction of subjectivity in the film, see Tomasulo (1988). He argues that '*Marienbad* articulates the essential logic of human consciousness' (69).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Beltzer (2000) argues that the film's script was based on a novel, *The Invention of Morel* (1941) by Adolfo Bioy Casares.

<sup>7</sup> Robbe-Grillet was quite popular at the time: 'in [an] interview with him in October 1959, [the interviewer states that] two thousand copies of [his] most recent book, *In The Labyrinth*, were sold in its first two days alone' (Neupert 2002: 18). However, he 'complained that his theoretical arguments caused many popular and serious critics alike to crown him king of a new literary youth movement that they variously labelled the New Novel, the Objective Novel, the School of Minuit, and *ecole du regard* (school of the glance)' (18).

<sup>8</sup> Robbe-Grillet assigned the letters X, A and M to the characters in the script for the purpose of distinguishing them. This is not very different from having no names in the film. Both the letters and the images prevent us from knowing anything factual or true about the characters, such as a name. *Marienbad* moves away from presenting even a partial truth about any character or incident.

<sup>9</sup> The dialogue here literally points at the ambiguity of time similar to the discussion of when the photograph was taken. This year could be last year; uncertainty and repetition are two characteristics of this unknown time.

<sup>10</sup> Another game that signifies the competition and contrast between the two men, similar to the shooting, is the strange card game the two men play. In fact, the way the men stand in a line during the shooting match the card game graphically and these two scenes are consecutively placed.

<sup>11</sup> Noël Carroll also argues that *Marienbad*'s narrative structure makes us formulate questions that it never answers whereas *Memento*'s 'challenges spectators to make sense of it and [...] to observe introspectively the way in which they manage to accomplish this feat' (2009: 134).

<sup>12</sup> The protagonist, Leonard, talks about the 'feel of a person' as he remembers fragments of memories with his wife such as a brushstroke on her hair, a book in her hand and a smile in sunlight.

<sup>13</sup> *Memento: Limited Edition* DVD released by Columbia TriStar contains this chronological version of the film. Andrew Kania argues that the film's DVD extras and its website materials decrease the number of ambiguities introduced by its complex structure. He discusses whether *Memento* is a film or a 'kind of hybrid artwork' (2009: 179) made up of the actual film, its DVD and website. A. O. Scott and Manohla Dargis recently tackled the same issue in *The New York Times*. According to Dargis, 'our relationship with movies [...] shifted further with the introduction of DVD, which gave viewers even more and possibly deeper ways into a film [...] This new film-audience relationship may help account

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for the emergence of these new, complex narratives' (2012). He argues that *Memento* 'both confounded and rewarded audiences with its narrative puzzle, and it helped create intense fan engagement, which sustained the film's theatrical afterlife. It also paved Mr. Nolan's way to Warner Brothers and, eventually, to *Inception*, a blockbuster phenomenon that proves that the mind-game film is no longer merely a cult item'.

<sup>14</sup> *Anatomy of a Scene* (2001) is a documentary on the making of *Memento* that can be found on the DVD released by Pathé Distribution.

<sup>15</sup> The protagonist, Joel, realises the consequences of memory erasure.

<sup>16</sup> For an extensive analysis of issues relating to memory and how it is materialised in the film see Van Dijck (2004).

<sup>17</sup> The transitions from one scene to the other are weak; in some cases they are linked only with a hardly noticeable word or an image. This form brings to mind the popular game of the Surrealists: Consequences, also referred to as The Exquisite Corpse (*cadavre exquis*). One starts drawing or writes a word on a piece of paper and the next continues without seeing the previous content. The end result is a complete image or a sentence whose parts do not necessarily link to one another in any sense.

<sup>18</sup> In *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Italo Calvino writes stories by putting tarot figures on a table. In the end note he explains that 'This book is made first of pictures... Through the sequence of the pictures stories are told, which the written word tries to reconstruct and interpret' (1977: 123). Towards halfway in the book, he describes how the table becomes covered with cards as each story advances from the previous one and how many readings and interpretations can be made in every direction. He later writes 'The trick of arranging some tarots in a line and making stories emerge from them is something I could perform also with paintings in museums' (105), which could also explain how the practice of curating functions in some sense. This episodic structure is a mark of modernist literature and *Eternal Sunshine*'s narrative has a very similar form; each scene can be seen as an individual tarot card.

<sup>19</sup> For a collection of essays on the intersection of memory and philosophy through the film's analyses, see Grau (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Hollis Frampton's avant-garde film *Zorn's Lemma* (1970) is a good example of how style can attain development similar to a narrative. The film is composed of a pattern of repetition. There is a sequence of shots of words that are ordered alphabetically according to their first letter. We know that the sequence will go back to the beginning once it stops counting the alphabet. Although the shot of each word representing a letter will be different, the sequence is the same. There is no narrative in the film in terms of a continuity in consecutive shots. The narrative is that each shot representing a letter from the alphabet will be replaced by its visual representative. The film provides us with cues to follow this narrative through the development of style. A similar approach is used in *Memento* where the opening scene has all the guidelines for us to follow: the rewinding, the shift to colour from black and white, the Polaroid. This pattern in *Memento* is also a part of the narrative.

## Chapter Three

### TELLING STORIES WITH ABSENCES

#### Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, in *The Material Ghost* Gilberto Perez draws attention to the similarity between telling and counting. He explains the proximity of the meanings of these two words and brings to attention the similarity of their sounds in different languages.<sup>1</sup> Perez argues that to tell a story, we have to put events, incidents, occurrences in some kind of an order. He writes,

But it is not in the nature of things that they always come after another in time; it is owing to the artificiality of language that they have to come one after another in telling.

A narrative sequence, what is told first and what next and what next up to the end is always to some extent an order of our making. The succession we make of things when we tell about them marks the artifact that is a narrative. A narrative is not just a story, something that happened or imagined to have happened, but a story told: not a sequence that happened but a sequence made. (2000: 51)

Telling is indeed like counting: an order is immanent. Films are also told in a linear order, inevitably, because of the nature of the medium. Whether they are shot on celluloid film or recorded digitally, they are exhibited on screen with a projection machine through which still photographs run one after another. Calling attention to this process, Laura Mulvey writes,

Cinema's forward movement, the successive order of film, merges easily into the order of narrative. Linearity, causality and the linking figure of metonymy, all crucial elements in story-telling, find a correspondence in the unfolding, forward-moving direction of film. (2006: 69)

The mechanical, prosaic, quality of the projector's start and halt gains an aesthetic reflection in narrative beginnings and endings. (74)

Mulvey questions two opposing concepts prevalent in the essence of the filmic medium: movement and stillness. The illusion of movement is born out of stillness; editing, camera movements and the forward-moving narrative further support this

illusion. Continuity in the narrative, beginnings and endings are all associated with the tendency to conceal the stillness inherent in the medium. Mulvey argues that for Barthes the cinematic *punctum* is lost in the forward drive of the narrative. Talking about the multiple viewing possibilities that DVDs offer, she writes,

Textual analysis has always generated a tension between a coherent narrative 'whole' and its forward drive and the desire to slow down the movement of film so that time itself becomes palpable... A segment extracted from the flow of narrative bears witness to the pull towards tableaux that has always been there in cinema. (2006: 150)

This argument can be linked to Perez's idea of telling as counting. Narration inevitably moves forward; halts, interruptions or omissions affect the continuity of the narrative. A description does not move the narrative forward, but adds to our understanding of it; a description pauses narrative time yet narration continues. There are no temporal pauses in real life experiences; however, their telling always includes absences, halts and pauses, which turn disorder into an order of its own.<sup>2</sup> In certain examples of narrative cinema, there are sequences that demand interpretation, forcing us to pay more attention to style. These are not minor breaks in the story that can be ignored; they are always among the main elements that make up the film. Halting or interrupting narrative continuity has a meaning in the story.

Perez notes that telling is like counting in terms of form. As we listen, watch or read a narrative, we have to pay attention to the form in order to understand it. The 'how' of the story unquestionably adds to its 'what'. Telling is always in a linear order, but the story can be disorderly. In other words, narration is always continuous while the narrative is not. Building on Perez's discussion of the narrative sequence and V. F. Perkins's ideas in his essay 'How is What', I argue that film style adds meaning to the story. Absences, pauses or halts in the narrative break the expected unity of spatiality, temporality and causality, which seemingly produces discontinuity.



However, if such uses are conscious stylistic choices, they can actually yield other meanings.

Evidently, discontinuity is not solely limited to non-linearity; there are other ways in which narrative unity is broken. Non-linearity generally indicates that there is a disruption in temporality created through the film's unusual editing. However, discontinuity can also exist when a film's spatial or causal elements do not cohere to establish a meaningful narrative world. Some films obscure necessary spatial and temporal links between scenes so that the causality is partially or completely lost. Even though the story moves forward in a linear fashion, there are gaps in the narrative that gives it a discontinuous nature. This chapter is going to focus on such films in which the coherence of the filmic world is manipulated. This is achieved by either withholding a significant constituent in the narrative, providing no closure in the end or abandoning an already established unity of temporal, spatial and causal elements.

It is not uncommon in the history of cinema for narrative films to eradicate strong temporal, spatial or causal links to tell their stories. In some cases, the narrative is not even based on a conventional linear story; through the sequence of causally detached scenes, a feeling, a question or an idea is suggested. In other words, absences or gaps, which are inherent in narrative cinema, are made explicit in these films and used as a characteristic of their style. Absence is the overarching concept that is used in this chapter to describe and investigate the nature of these disrupted narratives. The chapter will explore absence by focusing mainly on three films: *L'Eclisse* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1962), *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) and *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005). *L'Eclisse*, seemingly begins at the end of another story between two lovers; henceforth its narrative never follows a cause and

effect order. *Persona*'s narrative is divided into two parts created by the aggressive visual split in the middle. In *Caché*, the main mystery that initiates the story is never solved and it even becomes futile in the end. One thing that all these films have in common is the manipulation of the cause and effect chain. Their narratives lack sufficient information to form a story with reliable and definite temporal, spatial and causal elements, which would seemingly lead to a discontinuity. Although time in these films moves in a relatively linear fashion, gaps in the narratives and interferences with storytelling efface narrative continuity.

Whether it is rendered invisible or used for developing the story, absence is fundamental to cinema. This chapter is going to explore the concept of absence through the analyses of these three films, especially focusing on the different effects and outcomes that it produces. It considers the following questions: Does the absence of a necessary element in narrative unity obscure and/or change our understanding of the story? In what ways can absence be used in films and what does its use achieve? Can absence be used as a storytelling device? Does absence of a narrative or a stylistic element make a film discontinuous or can it produce an opposite situation? Before going into film analyses in order to answer these questions, it is essential to explain what absence means in relation to narrative cinema and discuss this concept in relation to discontinuity.

### **Absence as a Fundamental Element in the Filmic Medium**

In the beginning, the reason why cinema became popular was its ability to show something that was not there. One of the reasons why early films composed of one shot such as *La Sortie des usines Lumière* (The Lumière Brothers, 1895) or Georges Méliès's *Un homme de têtes* (1898) were interesting for audiences was the

opportunity they offered for the first time in history to observe the recording of an event happening in space and time. Maxim Gorky refers to the experience of watching films as being in ‘the kingdom of shadows’ and defines cinema as ‘not motion but its soundless spectre’ (quoted in Ellis 2000: 20).<sup>3</sup> Presumably, one of the sensations that the cinematic experience granted to the pristine audiences was the strange condition of being able to observe the imprint of things in motion. There was clearly an interest in both the appearance of moving images on the screen and how they appeared there. Most film scholars later categorised the films of Méliès and Lumière as representing two distinct ways of filmmaking: one celebrated and manifested the illusion that the medium is capable of presenting, offering audiences the chance to witness a fantastic event; the other specialised in bringing out cinema’s potential of documenting an actual event in reality. The desires to attain reality and illusion were both expressed in the same form: silent, black and white, single shot and static camera. To see moving images was already by itself deceptive and seemed unreal; it is hard to tell what the audiences believed. The camera may have been considered a device of truth if they judged every film they saw by its capability to record reality or it may have merely been seen as an instrument of illusion that only created unreal events, situations or characters. As an alternative to those viewpoints that separate the early films, I link the similar origins of both types of films, seeing them as rooted in the filmmakers’ enthusiasm to explore absence.

Referring to this early period in cinema, Tom Gunning also draws attention to the similarity between the two different approaches in filmmaking. He writes,

I believe that the relation to the spectator set up by the films of both Lumière and Méliès (and many other film-makers before 1906) had a common basis, and one that differs from the primary spectator relations set up by narrative film after 1906. I will call this earlier conception of cinema, ‘the cinema of attractions’[...] In fact the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of the narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain

avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g. the musical) than others. (1997c: 57)

Gunning suggests that the films that make up 'the cinema of attractions' are primarily spectacles and the attraction is not their content but their exhibition. If we take his argument a step further, it is the mere difference between the time and space combinations of that which is filmed and its screening that creates the attraction for the audiences. In other words, the delay between recording and watching, the difference between then and now, forms the main interest and this delay corresponds to one of the functions of absence in cinema. This absence presumably marvelled audiences then. Gunning argues that 'the cinema of attractions' continued to exist in avant-garde filmmaking after the dominance of the narrative form. In terms of form there is an obvious distinction between narrative and experimental approaches, however, one of the main raw materials they share is absence. If D. W. Griffith, in the first decade of the twentieth century, was developing continuity editing so that the film flowed smoothly without disruptions, avant-garde filmmakers like Fernand Léger, a decade later, were working with a film style that aimed to disengage the audience and prevent temporal, spatial or causal continuity. Griffith's approach attempted to create a continuity out of absence, whereas Léger used absence as a fundamental part of the content, making it apparent.

Therefore, it is unavoidable that cinema, as an art form, has explored the idea of absence. Not only is absence one of the essential characteristics of the medium, it is also an indispensable device in film narration. Films tell stories through absence and through the contradictory states that absence creates. What is projected on screen is its absence (from this moment), that is, what has already taken place in the past. The viewing experience will always be temporally and spatially inconsistent with it.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there is the issue of the fictional event that we see on screen, which

belongs only to the filmic world because it exists only if projected. Cavell describes this as

movies [being] 'something on their own'; the only thing they *could* be recordings of – real events happening as they are transcribed on the screen – have simply never taken place [...] The events in a movie are ones that we can never be, or can never have been, present at apart from the movie itself. (1979: 182-183)

Absence refers to the past tense inherent in all films, which is a result of the delay between recording and projecting. Moreover, absence describes the nature of the fictional event, which does not exist apart from its screening.

In addition, the idea of absence is connected to off-screen space. When recording, the camera leaves something out and we acknowledge the fact of an extended world beyond the frame. André Bazin writes,

The screen is not a frame like that of a picture but a mask which allows only a part of the action to be seen. When a character moves off screen, we accept the fact that he is out of sight, but he continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the decor which is hidden from us. (1967: 105)

The reason why the screen is like a mask is not due to the mobility of the camera or of the objects moving in front of it. Even if we were to watch a shot that looked like a photograph, we would imagine a world existing beyond the frame; we would expect movement and intrusion. The movement of the filmstrip is the essential element that creates time in the filmic medium, which, consequently, refers to the absence on screen: the reality of the filmic world is larger than that on the screen. There is a distinction between looking at a photograph and watching a freeze frame, which comes from our knowledge of the possibility that the images on screen can start moving at any time. We accept the fact that there is a world outside the frame because of our awareness of time and movement in the filmic medium. Films not only present us with things that are absent, but also let us imagine the extended absence that is beyond the frame as a continuous thing. Pascal Bonitzer also refers to

Bazin's idea of screen as a mask and argues that 'the great problem which obsesses classical cinema is, as we know, "how to get from one shot to the next"; how to get to the next shot without stumbling or tripping up' (1990: 297). He calls this 'the fear of a hole' (297) and points at how classical cinema strives to preserve continuity regardless:

We are therefore interested in 'what is not there' in the filmic image, according to a double register of lack: (1) 'diachronically', what is between two-shots, (2) 'synchronically', what is out-of-frame. The out-of-frame gap is of course reduced in the diachronic articulation of the shots. In classical representational cinema this benefits a linear causality. (293)

Pascal Bonitzer is critical of how classical cinema produces a so-called reality effect and refuses to think of the off-screen space as a continuity of the fictional on-screen world. The important part in his discussion that is relevant to this thesis is the idea of exclusion and how our viewing process involves that which is excluded as much as what we perceive on the screen.

The basic illusion that narrative films offer, then, is the creation of a seemingly continuous story with the means provided by absence. Objects do not move; each second is composed of their twenty-four static images. Paused frames run after one another to give the illusion of movement. The transition from stillness to movement is only made possible with the running filmstrip. The regular (dis)appearance of still frames creates movement; stillness is disguised as absence because of this movement. Delay is a necessary constituent in cinematic narration; without the existence of a delay between the capturing and screening of images, storytelling becomes impossible. Editing is a tool that moulds absence to create narrative continuity. It is only through the reorganisation of recorded discontinuous images that telling becomes possible. Continuity in cinema, therefore, is based on absence; recording is slicing time up into paused frames and screening is the delayed

exhibition of the illusion of movement created through the immediate appearance and disappearance of these paused frames.

To film something in its absoluteness is impossible. There are always an infinite number of viewpoints to choose from, which corresponds to the infinite number of angles at which a camera can be positioned. Similarly, proximity to the event can change our understanding drastically. When filming, eventually a decision has to be made about a beginning and an ending, that is, duration. One shot, therefore, represents the choices made in terms of viewpoint and proximity and, conversely, all the possible choices left out. Within the shot, a part of a whole is taken out and forever confined in the limits of that one shot. Bazin writes, 'The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object' (1967: 96-97). This paradox is due to the extracting of an object in space and time, assigning it a beginning and an end and restricting it in a loop. In other words, the object is removed from infinity and captured forever within a precise duration. Antonioni refers to the same paradox when he compares painting to cinema; for a painter, the problem is of "discovering a static reality", while for "a director, the problem is in taking a reality that grows and wears itself out, [...] a whole that is invisible and spread out in duration. And this duration informs it and determines its very essence" (Quoted in Ford 2003). Perez's similar comparison of painting and cinema is useful in defining how absence works in filmmaking; he writes, 'Narrative makes life into a sequence, painting makes life into a simultaneity' (2000: 51). One shot can exist by itself in a loop forever, resembling painting's capacity of being 'there all at once' (51). It is only when it is spatially, temporally or causally locked in the narrative

sequence that a shot loses this characteristic. Features of absence that a shot holds within itself are eliminated with narrative continuity.

In every film, between two successive shots, there is always a cut. Continuity editing works to diminish the existence of the absence between two shots by providing the smoothest transition possible. However, a scene nevertheless contains those cuts and absences as well; an effect, a feeling or a meaning is not only created through the images, but also through the transition between them. This is a subject that is also explored in painting. René Magritte's *Man with a Newspaper* (1928), for example, depicts the idea of the significance of the absence between two shots.



**Figure 3.1** *Man with a Newspaper* (René Magritte, 1928)

The canvas is divided into four frames, portraying the interior of the same room from the same viewpoint. The only different frame is the one on the top left; there is a man with a newspaper sitting in the armchair in the room. It is the composition of those four frames that forms the totality of this painting. The man with the newspaper is not emphasised in a single frame in which he is sitting in the armchair, but with the contrast of the three frames where he is not present. There is not much distinction in



the images, but their combination urges us to pay attention to the transition, the difference. Similarly, Johannes Kahrs' *La Révolution Permanente* (2000) questions how absence affects our viewing. The painting is composed of two frames taken from a music video of The Rolling Stones. Kahrs has drawn the two frames side by side 'in order to suggest movement. The suspense then lies in between the two scenes'.<sup>5</sup> A similar approach can be applied to think about how narrative is



**Figure 3.2** *La Révolution Permanente* (Johannes Kahrs, 2000)

constructed in cinema. That which is kept out of frame, or more precisely, that which is absent, forms a substantial part of the final film; the shots hint and suggest while the cuts make us infer things. Most of the time, a whole take is never used in films; a cut literally cuts the filmstrip. Through termination, elimination and the creation of absence continuity is formed.

The representation of reality has always been one of the central problems of art. When referring to the dissolution of event, character and plot in modernist literature, Hayden White argues that

This dissolution undermines a founding presupposition of Western realism: the opposition between fact and fiction. Modernism resolves the problems posed by traditional realism, namely, how to represent reality realistically, by simply abandoning the ground on which realism is construed as an opposition between fact and fiction. The denial of the reality of the event undermines the very notion of 'fact' informing traditional realism. (1996: 18)

Cinematic realism's predicament, on the other hand, is not 'how to represent reality realistically'; it is to disregard the opposition between fact and fiction and treat them

as one. Commenting on Bazin's writings about realism, Gilles Deleuze writes that 'The real was no longer represented or reproduced but "aimed at"' (2000: 1).

Confronted with the problematic of the impossibility of representing reality, realism in cinema unifies fact and fiction whereas modernism seeks to emphasise the flow between them. In this flow, works of modernist art prepare the ground for ambiguity rather than certainty.<sup>6</sup> Deleuze defines this as

a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility. (2000: 7)

Perhaps that 'point of indiscernibility' is an integral element of the medium from which all filmmakers and filmmaking have started out. It is a result of absence and its components, which are essential to cinema. The history of narrative filmmaking comprises examples that experiment with deconstructing and eliminating this indiscernibility in an attempt to diminish the opposition between imaginary and real (or fiction and fact). Alternative examples, on the other hand, embraced that point of indiscernibility, made it into a subject matter and continued to produce works of art without the concern of enabling audiences to discern something.

As discussed in Chapter One, what Bazin calls 'the myth of total cinema' is an enduring fantasy of humankind to replicate real life. Just as one of the fundamental and perpetual subjects that the arts are concerned with is the problem of existence, the sciences also predominantly question and explore human life. The reasons behind the research on human cloning are not very different from those behind the development of the *cinématographe*: to develop a better understanding that would perhaps lead to some knowledge of life. Cinema developed from a desire to capture movement and time, and the camera was a product of science that was meant to satisfy this desire.

During the early years of cinema, audiences were entertained and fascinated by the recording of movement; what was actually moving or what it meant was of less significance. Whether it was an *actualités* by the Lumière Brothers, most of which pointed at the reality-recording characteristics of the medium, or a narrative film by Méliès, which emphasised the illusion and the magic behind it, the spectacle was the recording of the drama as much as the drama or the narrative itself.

Filmmakers' curiosity in analysing movement and time – two primary components of life – using these two different modes, gradually merged to develop into an interest in telling stories. Storytelling coupled with photography's capability of producing images that resembled their models were stimulants to embrace realism. The objectivity of the lens means that storytelling has to start out with raw materials (or images) that are captured from reality. Realism in painting was related to the obsession of humankind with replicating and preserving; photography and cinema have advanced this obsession to a level that painting is incapable of attaining. In time, technology has worked to improve the quality of photographic images and to minimise the visual difference between the model and its copy. Advancements in cameras, as well as any accompanying technology such as editing and lighting devices or special effects software have enabled the creation of a more flawlessly realistic image.

This tendency also altered and merged the different approaches of Méliès and the Lumières. Technology and style in cinema predominantly developed to use illusion to create a reality. Illusion was concealed in an attempt to embellish that created reality and to make it more believable. Stories became the central focus of cinema, while form provided support for them to be told smoothly. Since Griffith, for instance, the formula of continuity editing has approximately remained the same,

basing its structure on the aim of presenting a clear and linear narrative without disruptions to our sense of space, time and causality. Absences, therefore, have generally been concealed in order to serve the realism of the fictional world instead of being manifested as an inherent characteristic of the medium.<sup>7</sup>

As Pascal Bonitzer simply puts it: ‘The cinematic image is haunted by what is not in it [...] Characterised by an absence, the filmic image works (the story makes it work), ingrained with what is not there’ (1990: 293). Form in cinema is based on the tension between binaries: absence and presence, stillness and movement, continuity and discontinuity, illusion and reality. Realism demands complete and continuous narratives, which has led filmmakers to refrain from revealing this tension and integrating it as a part of the story, whereas modernism takes this tension as natural and bases its narration on it. Conventionally, stylistic elements are not marked out individually and storytelling supports their invisible unity.<sup>8</sup> They do not call attention to themselves but rather to the narrative that they support. Conventions are formed through trial and repetition of techniques; familiarity is the key requirement. Examples in the history of cinema that break this invisible conventionality have adapted such a stylistic choice to disorient us and to emphasise that disorientation. Although all films we watch are inevitably and essentially based on the tensions mentioned above, artistic conventions encourage us to ignore them. A century after the birth of cinema, some non-realistic choices such as non-diegetic music are acceptable in terms of the fictional world; others, though, such as complete silence, have the potential to disrupt the continuity of a narrative. Discontinuities are concealed through repetition of familiar techniques or if they are revealed, it is to draw attention to the form of the film. It is these kind of narrative fictional films that are the focus of this thesis. They use individual elements of film style and narrative

in an explicit manner, which seemingly creates discontinuity. What is explored in this chapter is whether an opposite outcome is possible. The central problem that these kinds of films deal with is the tension of binaries inherent in the medium: presence is born out of absence; realism is created through illusion and perhaps continuity can be formed out of discontinuous shots. These films expose absences and discontinuities rather than hiding and moulding them into a believable continuity.

An example from the previous chapter, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, is worth mentioning here, as it builds the couple's story with absences. Only distinct moments from their past are presented in a disorder, making it difficult to form a whole. Their entire story is never disclosed, but we get a feeling from the instances, looks, pieces of dialogue provided to us. This fragmented presentation affects the construction and meaning of the narrative. The memory erasure is a narrative tool that connects the discontinuous scenes to tell a story about a relationship. The three films that are studied in this chapter have similar forms, but they lack such obvious tools that provide an excuse for the absences in their narratives. *L'Eclisse*, *Persona* and *Caché* all have absences, omissions and interferences, the reasons for which are not explained within the films' narrative boundaries. Although the films withhold crucial information regarding their main storylines, they open up new subjects beyond the apparent ones. All these films are self-reflexive or self-analytical in the sense that the choices made concerning their style are conscious decisions which emphasise the medium of their expression. These choices are the most conspicuous features in these films; they cannot go unnoticed. What this chapter explores in detail is whether these obvious choices can become an instrument to create continuity rather than remaining as a disruption of our engagement with the filmic world.

***L'Eclisse*: 'An<sup>x</sup> empty<sup>y</sup> lot.<sup>z</sup> She<sup>k</sup> walks away.<sup>n</sup>'<sup>9</sup>**

Perez describes Antonioni as 'a master of the unresolved absence' (2000: 387) and *L'Eclisse* is perhaps his masterpiece of absence. The loose narrative of *L'Eclisse* is similar to *Marienbad* in many ways, but it is unquestionably more structured and comprehensible. Due to a lack of a chain of events, it is not easy to summarise the story of the film; it does not have a centre, only peripheries.<sup>10</sup> As Sam Rohdie writes, 'In *L'Eclisse* the subject of the film is always just out of reach; when you arrive at it, either it becomes something else, or rather than being what you sought, only creates another thing to find' (1990: 114). There are many gaps in *L'Eclisse*'s narrative; however, temporal and spatial links are more consistent than in a film like *Marienbad*, which makes the causal gaps easier to grasp. The absences in causality do not affect the flow of the film. There is a continuous linear flow in the narrative, which is that of Vittoria (Monica Vitti) moving from one scene to the other, almost leading the camera herself. We follow Vittoria in an attempt to arrive at the subject of the film. The action of her walking is perhaps the main thread that holds the disconnected scenes together; other than that, there are no events.<sup>11</sup> Such a structure is a characteristic of modernist literature as well. As Richard Gilman writes,

...ennui, extremity, anguish, abandoned searches, the event we are looking for never happening – as Godot never comes, Beckett and Antonioni being two who enforce our relinquishments of the answer, the arrival, two who disillusion us. (Quoted in Chatman 1985: 55)<sup>12</sup>

*L'Eclisse* adds mobility to its characters, but preserves the postponement of any important event as in *Waiting for Godot*. As their titles suggest, waiting is the dominant action of the play, and the eclipse (of either time, space or motion) is the central issue of the film.

The use of absence in *L'Eclisse* is an instrument of style that helps to build the narrative. Two consecutive shots in a scene may not be spatially, temporarily or

causally linked to one another, but the transition between them (namely, the cut or the absence) is a function of narration. Taking scenes from *La Notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961) as an example, Chatman indicates that the ‘causal connections among these events are not clear’ (1985: 75); because of the lack of a strong link between the events, we only infer what may have tempted the characters to act as they do. He continues to write that ‘the critical word here is *infer*: where the connections between events are tenuous, the demands on the audience to interpret, to provide connections, intensify’ (75). In other words, as absences leave the narrative incomplete, they also become tools for us to construct meaning and produce interpretations. An element of discontinuity, therefore, is used as an indirect mediator of meaning. The style in the film becomes the narrative itself. From the beginning of the movie, there is always a suggestion of the world beyond, both through the use of camera and editing. The story is absent in the film; this is a film about an indefinite time in Vittoria’s life.

The opening scene comprises most of the stylistic characteristics of the film. Vittoria and Riccardo (Francisco Rabal) are spending their last morning together as a couple after what seems to be a long night of serious arguments. Not many hints are given about the reasons for the break up; only fragments of feelings remain: bitterness, love, confusion, insecurity. The prevailing calmness and reticence in the scene suggests what the previous night has been like; this is perhaps the reverse of what they ever had together. The story of Vittoria and Riccardo is already over and we observe their final moments. The film starts with the idea of any break up, not precisely pointing at the nature of the relationship that these two characters had. No substantial information is given about their relationship through dialogue. Moreover, the conversation does not always build itself on a subject; sentences remain

unattended or disrupt any continuity that is about to form. Shots in this scene are also unattached, indicating the style that will be prevalent throughout the movie.

The film continues with this sense of detachment. Vittoria, determined to end the relationship, gets out of the apartment and starts wandering around in the city. The subsequent scenes have no logical order and provide no information about what happened or what is happening; the causal link of a scene with its following one is never apparent. They are random instances reflecting Vittoria's indifference, disinterestedness and inertia. As Gilberto Perez writes,

An ellipsis in Antonioni typically marks an uncertainty. We cannot supply the missing piece with confidence: about the gap that's left open we can only speculate. The missing piece is truly missing, not merely a rhetorical omission but a felt lack in our knowledge. (2000: 368)

There are no causal links between the scenes after Vittoria leaves Riccardo's flat: the walk to the Stock Market, either with or without the intention of seeing her mother, the visit to her neighbour in the evening, the dog chase, the aeroplane ride. As the story develops, it feels as if it does so randomly. None of these scenes provides definite informative answers for the absences in the main narrative: Why did Vittoria break up? How does she feel? How is her relationship with her mother? The narrative is not based on a linear causal structure in which one thing leads to another. The scenes in *L'Eclisse* are designed to give the feel of what is happening. Neither the dialogue nor the action in these scenes serves the main narrative in terms of supplying us with information and facts.

The scene in which Vittoria goes to Verona on a private plane with her friends exemplifies some of the key characteristics of the film's structure, including randomness. This day scene starts quite sharply after a night scene in which Riccardo comes to Vittoria's building to visit her, but she hides from him. There are no indications in this previous scene or in any preceding scene about the trip to Verona.



At the beginning of the scene, for ten seconds or so, we see one of the wings from a passenger seat as the plane takes off. The loud and disturbing sound of the plane's engines as well as the whiteness of the image is in contrast with the silence and darkness that dominate the previous scene. This transition is abrupt and takes us to an indefinite time and place. Likewise, Vittoria's uneasiness suddenly shifts to an indecipherable joy. The plane ride lasts about three minutes. Most images are of Verona from the sky and of Vittoria looking out the window. There is minimal dialogue, what there is refers to the types of clouds in the sky. Vittoria seems curious and somewhat nervous. Here and in the following moments, all these mixed emotions Vittoria appears to feel are suggested through Vitti's performance and the remote way she is photographed in the frame in relation to other characters and things around her. After the plane lands, Vittoria and her three friends get off. Instead of joining them, she chooses to remain in the air field for a while (Figure 3.3). Again, this moment adds nothing substantial to our knowledge of the character; it is a pause in the ongoing narrative. However, observing her actions and the compositions of the frames leads to inferences about her complicated emotional state. At the start, she seems to be excited about seeing a plane land. In fact, she hesitates to go back to join her friends and decides to turn back once more to gaze at other planes.<sup>13</sup> She is the only person in the vast field; she appears small, fragile and helpless. Her shifting facial expressions reflect her isolated and unprotected existence. Similar to many instances in which we see her during the film, the final look she assumes in the field suggests wariness. This is almost a metaphysical look, invoking a warning against an imminent catastrophe. Whether it is about the future or her own being, Vittoria knows more than us, the audience, but she will not share this knowledge with anyone.



**Figure 3.3** Vittoria alone in the air field

The rest of the scene continues with Vittoria's unhurried wanderings as she walks towards a café nearby calmly observing the things around her. When she reaches the café, she does not go in; she stops at the doorway and looks inside. At this moment, the camera also comes inside, permitting us to watch Vittoria with the other characters in the café. Without any intention of going in, Vittoria continues to observe the people and the space silently and warily, slightly smiling only in return to a stranger's 'hello' from inside. Finally she chooses to sit outside, as the camera frames her behind the café's multi-framed window. The scene ends as abruptly as it begins: her friend approaches and tells her that the others are coming. Vittoria replies: 'It's so nice here' (Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.4** Vittoria's ephemeral emotions

The Verona scene demonstrates how Antonioni uses absence. The plane trip has neither causal connection to previous events in the narrative nor any effect on the following ones. Characters, locations, actions and encounters all seem insignificant in the overall narrative. This is a scene that directs attention only to Vittoria; instead of driving the narrative forward, the scene arrests the narrative for a while and directs the attention to the diversities of the emotional state that she is in. The curiosity and joy she seemingly feels in the plane cease to exist when she gets off and are exchanged with the wary look she carries throughout most of the film. This look is multi-faceted; in it there are traces of her fragility and hesitancy as well as her playfulness and hope. However, in a fleeting moment the same look can evoke uncertainty and fear.

As is evident in this example, there is a dominating sense of absence in the film's narrative. Similar to the film's episodic editing with ellipses, Monica Vitti's performance also disregards narrative continuity and creates gaps, manifesting absence. She repeatedly shifts to a different mood; just as we think we understand the

state that she is in, through her reaction to an object, a person or scenery, she will immediately leave that state. Such a performance is evident in the brief and abrupt ending of the previous scene, for instance (Figure 3.4). Within several seconds, Vittoria's mood seemingly changes to uneasiness or unhappiness contrary to her verbal expression of content. Her gestures are always unstable making it difficult to pinpoint what she is thinking or how she is feeling. Neither the performances nor the narrative provide us with substantial information to back up what we infer from the scenes.

In all elements of style, the notion of absence is evident: editing will allow the frame to remain empty for a while when a character goes out of it; the camera will not necessarily be focusing on the event and may even turn away from it; acting will always be in transition, preventing us from constructing a solid character. Comparing *Marienbad* with another Antonioni film, *La Notte*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith writes that *Marienbad*,

presents reality as an infinite series of possibilities, all equally present and equally real. *La Notte*, in its attempt to make intelligible order out of chaos, seems excessively conventional; but this is an illusion. The order it presents so perfectly is not absolute. It is a provisional construct which requires perpetual re-creation. (1961/62: 31)

Similarly, the style in *L'Eclisse* assigns the notion of transition to the centre of the narrative without a pattern. There is a continuous flow between binaries: presence and absence, construction and deconstruction, stillness and movement, similarity and difference. This flow is perhaps the utmost representation of reality and what Deleuze refers to as the 'point of indiscernibility'.

The film's seemingly random structure calls attention to the visual images; instead of trying to construct a storyline to explain why these are happening, we observe what Vittoria is doing, how she behaves, where she looks at and how she might be feeling. *L'Eclisse* is based on lacks in the story. The focus is this woman in

transition, not the reasons behind the transition or where it is leading. As Perez writes, ‘Antonioni isn’t concerned only with matters of form: like all great modernists, he renders the acknowledged means of the medium themselves meaningful, metaphorical’ (2000: 375). Through the presence of absences we are led to pay attention to Vittoria. Her movements, gestures or reactions, shot against the background of the city, shift our focus to her world as it is. The insignificance of everyday encounters directs us to what is off-screen; the story is not in the film, but it has perhaps ended or it will begin or it is going on somewhere out of the frame. The idea of off-screen space also helps the filmmaker to tell us about an event without necessarily showing it. In these cases, the absence of something can substitute for its presence. Especially to create mystery or curiosity, referring to something off-screen through dialogue or the look of a character to something beyond the frame is common. As András Bálint Kovács summarises,

There are basically two reasons why a filmmaker would use offscreen space in the narrative process. One reason is to enhance dramatic tension, to raise the viewer’s curiosity, which curiosity is then satisfied later by showing what was unseen before. The other reason is to reduce information redundancy: part of the narrative information is conveyed only by two channels, not by three: either by time and sight (we see what is happening) or by time and sound (we hear what is happening). In the latter case we speak of minimalist use of offscreen space. Certain events are never seen onscreen, we can only hear the sounds. (2007: 142)

He then continues by discussing the use of off-screen space in Bresson’s filmmaking and points to how he radically minimises visual redundancy in his images, allowing only the most important visual element in his frames. In *L’Eclisse*, Antonioni also does something radical as the idea of off-screen space is extended to the whole film, but it is neither to create curiosity nor to reduce redundancy. Everything prompts us to look, to think and to imagine what might be beyond the frame; hence a multiplicity of interpretations is possible. The function of absence is to point to a range of different meanings rather than emphasising an indispensable fact in the narrative.

There is a scene in the film that explicitly plays with the idea of off-screen space. On one of the walls in Vittoria's neighbour's flat, there is a photograph of a beach in Kenya, where the woman comes from. As Vittoria approaches it, her neighbour says, 'We have a beautiful farm there. On the left'. The photograph resembles a touristic poster: an exotic and deserted beach with trees on the right and mountains on the horizon by the sea without a trace of any habitat. In the left of the frame is Vittoria's head, looking at the poster. She first points to the left side of the beach where there are apparently no houses (Figure 3.5). The woman directs her to go further to the left and she confirms the location of her farm to be the spot on the wall that Vittoria is pointing at (Figure 3.6). In parallel with their dialogue, first



**Figure 3.5** Vittoria looking at the photograph; **Figure 3.6** Vittoria's hand by the photograph. Vittoria's head goes out of the frame; it is only her hand pointing at the wall beside the photograph. Then the camera moves in further and the final image is of the photograph itself with the blank piece of wall on its left. This instance is a paradigm for visualising what Antonioni does with a frame: there is something outside of that frame and when you are directed to look away and imagine, you are able to see what it is.<sup>14</sup> Discussing this device, Seymour Chatman states that '*Temps mort* is perhaps the most characteristic of Antonioni's stylistic effects' (1985: 126). He refers to the off-screen world as extradiegetic and explains that,



The prediegetic instance can often be conventionally attributed to the familiar conventions of the establishing shot, but the postdiegetic lingering is more immediately provocative because it seems on first viewing to be a mistake, a piece of sloppy editing. In either case, the whole meaning of establishing has been radically altered. What is established is not “the same place” but the possibility that it is in reality “another place,” perhaps even an extradiegetic place. (1985: 125)

The style of *temps mort*, namely dead time, is also prevalent in the narrative.<sup>15</sup>

*L'Eclisse* is a film about that time period in which Vittoria is indecisive about her life; this is a time on hold in which the characters and us are looking, seeing and observing. The title, *The Eclipse*, appropriately suggests a blocking, concealment or halt. In this period of pause, nothing is emphasised too much: the stock market crash and the death of the drunkard are dealt with as if they were minor incidents, and indeed, they *are* minor incidents in this narrative. The use of absences in the film is almost like a reflection of Vittoria's interiority; this is time on pause for her. In reality, time does not exist as a piece of entity that can be segregated. Time does not accumulate; it leaves at the moment it arrives. Antonioni chooses to let the events happen. Not all the moments we go through make sense in a continuous order in reality and they are not perfectly constructed; therefore, this is a very realistic description of how we conceive time. An eclipse is like an interval or a pause: Antonioni is referring to those absent moments in life. Just as an eclipse obscures light, so he halts a part of the story.

In a similar way to Bazin, when he suggests the screen is a mask, Perez writes, ‘Film is an art of absence, of partial views, an art that hides more than it shows’ (2000: 387). Absences or gaps in the stories always exist: we cannot tell an entire story without omitting some parts. Even if an event were filmed like a documentary at the time and place it happened, the camera would omit what is outside its frame and outside its capacity to record. Referring to this infinity of alternatives Antonioni writes

The camera is a gossipy eye, hidden behind a keyhole, that records all it can. But how about what happens beyond the keyhole's range? [...] A mountain of material which captures not only the essential aspects of an event but the marginal, absurd, or ridiculous ones; your task then is to cut and select. The actual event included these aspects, all the nonsense, the extraneous matter. But selection falsifies it – or, as they say, interprets it [...] Life is not always simple, or intelligible; even history, taken as a science, cannot comprehend it completely. (1996: 56)

The narrative in *L'Eclisse* is full of interruptions, but it leaves the blanks as blanks, a part of the nature of things. These absences are not emphasised to create another meaning in the story, but they urge us to ask questions and produce numerous interpretations. Antonioni describes the images almost as organic: 'it is an indivisible whole that extends over a duration of its own which determines its very being' (1963/64: 14).

In the final scene, even though we are not provided with a causal structure up to this point, we watch expectantly to see if Vittoria and Piero will meet. Similar faces in familiar locations go about their usual wanderings. There is a certain resemblance in their actions: they look at something, and then they look away. We are rarely shown what it is they look at and we can never know what the expressions on their faces mean. In *L'Eclisse* the story does not end; the story, from the beginning, has been on hold. Referring to being terrified by this scene, Ian Cameron writes that 'The feeling is one of solitude – even the shots of people are of people alone... The other thing that makes this conclusion frightening is its lack of specificity (1968: 105). In addition to the content of the shots – bare locations and empty faces – in this sequence, their independence and detachment from one another are crucial. The narrative falls apart and is dismantled into almost static moments that could easily be followed by photographs. Even if we saw a glimpse of the couple meeting, it would make no difference. Nothing was actually important in the story; it does not have a beginning or an ending, a conflict or a resolution. There are no clues



to inform us about whether the two characters are going to meet or have met; retrospectively, it suggests that the film's main focus is not these characters anymore; possibly, it never was. The camera strays away from its previous subject matter to somewhere else, as if randomly filming. What was off-screen throughout the movie becomes the main focus in the closing sequence and, conversely the story of Vittoria and Piero maybe continues somewhere else, off-screen.

Vittoria's self-questioning is evident in the causally detached scenes, absent moments and suggestions of off-screen in *L'Eclisse*; Isak's (Victor Sjöström's) contemplation of his past is evident in the unusual flashbacks in *Wild Strawberries* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957). Absences, halts and pauses in this film's narrative are similar to *L'Eclisse*'s, except that Bergman uses memories and dreams to tell us about the protagonist's life.<sup>16</sup> *Wild Strawberries*'s present time is told in a conventionally structured, forward-moving narrative, which makes it stand out from most of the other examples in the thesis. However, the unspecified scenes from Isak's past that are randomly dispersed within the narrative disturb the order of the present time. During a trip to Lund, where he is going to be given an award for his 50 years of practice, Dr. Isak Borg remembers or re-experiences memories of his childhood. He also dreams about his old age and his profession. The film does not have an extremely fragmented style compared to contemporary examples with similar narratives; we are aware where the reality of the filmic world ends and dreams or memories begin. However, it produces more questions for us with its absences, hence creates discontinuity. In the end, we do not understand what kind of a man Isak is or what happened in the film. All we know is that Isak is questioning his life, his relationships with his late wife, his mother and his son and perhaps looking for an answer as to what led to his loneliness.

*Wild Strawberries* provides an alternative example for my discussion of absence in filmmaking, as the film has a linear and easily comprehensible structure: Isak wakes up one morning and decides to go to Lund by car; the film's narrative comprises the trip and the award ceremony. However, the events that take place during this trip remain secondary to and less significant than the interruptions of dream and memory sequences even though they construct the forward drive of the narrative. Memories and dreams, by their nature, are based on absence. We may omit or invent details of faces, places, names or things when we recall memories; they gradually transform into something else in time. Dreams are also constructs of our own minds, based on experiences, thoughts or preoccupations. *Wild Strawberries* discloses clues about the life of its protagonist through the visual representation of his unreliable dreams and remembrances. These memories and dreams are easily recognised and they do not disrupt the linearity of the story. We do not mistake the memory, dream or the filmic reality with one another as they are clearly identified. Furthermore, the linearity of the car journey acts as a conjoining tool that brings the separate and distinct realities together. Each memory or dream creates a halt in the trip and an ellipsis in the narrative because it produces more questions. How was the relationship between Isak and his late wife? Why is his son so bitter with him? What exactly does Isak miss or regret from his childhood? The film delineates an incomplete picture of this character; he remains a mystery like Vittoria in *L'Eclisse*. The narrative is an attempt to construct and understand Isak based on his memories and dreams and other people's views of him.

A sharper cut in causality exists in another Bergman film: *Persona*. The film not only starts out with indefinite persons, places and incidents, it creates further causal gaps as the narrative progresses. Released four years after *L'Eclisse*, *Persona*

is one of the most controversial, influential and criticised examples of modernist cinema; and it is another film that is built thematically and visually upon absence and fragmentation.

### **Split *Persona***

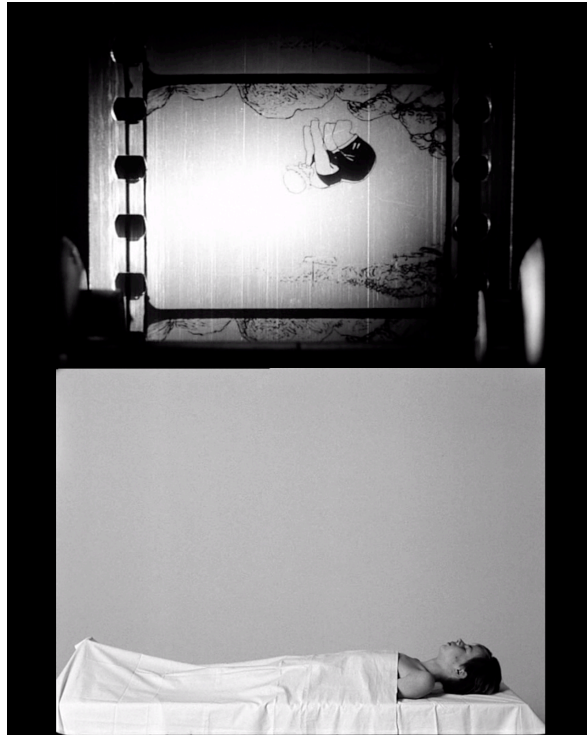
The main difference between *L'Eclisse* and *Persona*, as Susan Sontag argues, is that the latter 'resists being reduced to a "story"' (Sontag 1967: 187) whereas the former carries the traces of a story, its beginnings or its aftermath. In that sense, *Persona* approximates *Marienbad*'s style. Sontag makes a comparison between these two films and notes that,

there's no less of a mystery lodged in [*Persona*'s] setting. Images and dialogue are given which the viewer cannot help but find puzzling, not being able to decipher whether certain scenes take place in the past, present or future; and whether certain images and episodes belong to 'reality' or 'fantasy'. (1967: 186)

The absences in this film do not point to things happening off-screen as in *L'Eclisse*; some shots and scenes remain individual and disconnected, hardly making any references to the narrative. Kent Jones argues that, 'There are no signals of offscreen immanence in Bergman, as there are in Antonioni and Bresson and Dreyer. For Bergman's characters, there is nowhere to turn but toward themselves' (2007: 37). The causal gaps are not pertinent to the partially disclosed incidents in the filmic world. They are due to the lack of information about the complex characters. Visually, *L'Eclisse* allows its protagonist to reach out; *Persona*, on the other hand, frames, traps and dissects its characters with close-ups or static shots. The fragmented style in *Persona* may represent the uneasiness of war times or Elisabet's (Liv Ullmann's) mental instability and depression.<sup>17</sup> The style, therefore, complements its predominant theme: existential crisis, assessed through a combination of various feelings such as guilt, vanity, inadequacy, failure or jealousy.

Whether the reason for this fragmentation is due to Elisabet's unstable point of view or to the discomfort and paranoia that the times create, the narrative defies completion and regularly cracks. Peter Ohlin writes that, 'whatever may once have been a narrative has now become "database": something to be manipulated, edited, reorganized, recombined' and he calls *Persona*'s narrative 'a collection of filmic materials waiting for the spectator to bring it into being' (2005: 269-270).<sup>18</sup> Similarly Philip Mosley argues that Bergman has an 'acknowledged intention to extend interpretation to the onlooker to renounce narrative omnipotence' (1981: 126). Although this fragmentation urges us to make meaning out of it, as conventional narrative always asks us to do so, we cannot bring it into one being; we can only produce multiple interpretations.<sup>19</sup> I believe multiple interpretations should be made about the film because that is what it exactly calls for. My attempt in this chapter is not to present an interpretation, but to understand *how* it prepares grounds for *what* the film may be. Arguably with this style, Bergman also questions the characteristics of a narrative, especially its dependence on some kind of an order.

*Persona* begins with a slow fade-in of a white square on the black screen. For a moment the space looks like a movie theatre; the image changes as it lights up and we realise that it is the inside of a projector. The rest of this opening sequence is a montage of self-contained images: a running film strip, a short scene from what looks like a silent movie, a clip from an animation, a close-up of the eyes of a dying sheep, shots of dead, unconscious or immobile people (Figure 3.7). Any attempt to understand the meaning of this sequence is futile; each image evokes different associations; explanations and interpretations generate new grounds for thinking about it. However, the sequence can function as a clue in trying to understand the film; its abstract style is more meaningful when evaluated in conjunction with the



**Figure 3.7** Shots from *Persona*'s opening sequence.

fragmented narrative. Bergman's choice of images evokes notions that are significantly related to cinema: movement, death, stillness, illusion, animation, light and dark. If we take this sequence before the credits as an introduction to the movie, it can give us a clue to its form. Except for the child who wakes up in the morgue, whom we may later assume to be Elisabet's neglected son, this sequence has no direct connection to the film's narrative and the way it is edited is more fragmented than the movie itself. Elisabet, one of the female protagonists, is an actress who one day decides not to speak anymore. Her muteness may be due to a number of reasons; Alma, the nurse, may be representing her and verbalising her thoughts; the film's narrative may be based on human miscommunication depicted through the impossibility of the two women to understand what it feels to be the other. Many explanations are valid, but always incomplete. Just as there is no clear storyline and there are many gaps in it, the opening sequence is an abstract collage from the filmmaker that points towards the impossibility of telling a complete story in cinema.

Similar to Elisabet, Bergman seems to be suffering from and looking for answers to a problem about storytelling, representation and performance.

As is well known, halfway through the film, in the middle of a scene, a frame freezes, cracks and burns; the story begins somewhere else and with a more uncomfortable atmosphere. What had seemed to be a linear narrative up to this point reverses to become more abstract in terms of space, time and causality; this crack shifts the narrative to a more indecipherable level where we can no longer distinguish between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction or Alma and Elisabet. Not only are we reminded of the opening sequence, but also our engagement with the story is visually disrupted with this extremely self-reflexive fracture. Susan Sontag's observation of this interruption in relation to the beginning and the end of the film is crucial to our understanding of the use of fragments and absences:

Bergman's procedure, with the beginning and end of *Persona* and with this terrifying caesura in the middle, is more complex than the Brechtian strategy of alienating the audience by supplying continual reminders that what they are watching is theatre (i.e., artifice rather than reality). Rather, it is a statement about the complexity of what can be seen and the way in which, in the end, the deep, unflinching knowledge of anything is destructive. To know (perceive) something intensely is eventually to consume what is known, to use it up, to be forced to move on to other things. (1967: 190)

This interruption, as Sontag suggests, does not only refer to the medium of film itself; Bergman interrupts the narrative to give it a more fragmented form. If 'unflinching knowledge of anything is destructive', then a complete story is already dead. In other words, Bergman consciously refrains from explaining everything in order to keep the story alive and interesting, which can be returned to more than once. Robin Wood also finds it 'useless' to refer to this crack 'in terms of the Brechtian (or Godardian) alienation effect' (1969: 145). He adds that 'Bergman, on the contrary, draws the spectator into the film, demanding total emotional involvement' (145). After this

visual and narrative disruption, Bergman starts telling the story in fragments in order to be able to continue telling it.

One of the most striking scenes afterwards is when the two women are sitting across a table and Alma is telling Elisabet what she knows or perhaps what she thinks she knows about the way Elisabet feels towards her son. First, the camera is always on Elisabet, intermittently framing and reframing her face closer and from slightly varied angles while we watch her reactions to Alma's monologue off-screen. Then, the same scene repeats; only this time it is Alma that the parallel shifting shots frame. The way the camera frames the two women from two different positions matches each other and the monologue is exactly the same. Through this repetition we are forced to notice the differences and more importantly remember the previous instance. Instead of conventionally intercutting between the shot and the reverse-shot, Bergman chooses to provide the entirety of the two women's movements, reactions, looks and gestures. By refusing to cut back to the other person in each turn, he doubles the normal duration of the scene and disrupts the conventional continuity; however, Bergman preserves the individual continuity and completeness of the reactions and the monologue. Alma is telling Elisabet's story while Elisabet remains silent and this is the pattern for the whole movie. Alma's cry of protest at the end of the monologue when she says that she is not Elisabet hints again at the difficulty of storytelling and impossibility of understanding someone else's point of view completely. Alma fails to narrate Elisabet's story because she is not its subject.

The use of language in the film is another stylistic choice that brings to attention absence and discontinuity.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the film, Elisabet does not speak, while Alma constantly talks.<sup>21</sup> The film almost consists only of Alma's monologue; we try to understand Elisabet partly by observing her actions and partly by listening to

Alma's speech. Elisabet's silence is continuously contrasted with Alma's talking, which perhaps would not seem as intense if there were dialogue. The lack of dialogue creates discontinuous communication. One woman finds language meaningless, inadequate or false and chooses silence; the other links her existence firmly to her words, descriptions and verbalisations of her thoughts, dreams and memories. At times the language itself is interrupted; sometimes Alma's sentences are inexpressive and incomplete or the words we hear on the radio towards the end of the movie do not make sentences. The discontinuity of language is in parallel with the film's other stylistic choices; this is an interruption similar to the opening sequence, the crack in the middle or the monologue scene, which draws attention to the formal structure of the film and inhibits the narrative from having a continuity.

Style in *Persona* points at discontinuity and absence; it disrupts any conventional continuity that we are trying to form. Paisley Livingston refers to the cartoon figure that fluctuates between stillness and movement in the opening sequence as

a process openly demonstrated in *Persona* and secretly active in every other film [...] *Persona* captures both continuity and discontinuity, bringing them together to study their necessary relation. If the continuity is shown to be generated from discontinuity, the discontinuity is also presented as being part of this continuity [...] To assign priority to either of the two in a preemptory manner is to falsify their relation, and it is only in this paradoxical relation that the truth of the film can be discovered. (1982: 192)

It is only through the style of the film that we can begin to interpret *Persona*, which consequently is the content. The major stylistic choices – the opening and ending sequences, the crack in the middle, the unconventional montage at the table – help us understand the narrative, the characters and the film's subject. Discontinuity, fragmentation and absence obviously exist in the film; they disrupt continuity and prevent parts of the narrative from fitting into a perfect whole. However, the film also comprises the opposite, continuity, which provides grounds for the interaction,



tension and contrast of opposites. As Marilyn Johns Blackwell writes, ‘The film presents the theme of dualism and its opposite, mergence, a concern central to the film’ (1997: 136). Similar to *L’Eclisse*, there is a flow between binaries; readings, interpretations and meanings are going to be produced from this flow.

In the end what we have is diverse and rich interpretations for these films instead of a single one. Absence is a keyword to describe their forms, which allows for the diversity and richness. The function of absence is to create and reinforce the causal gaps in the narratives. Both *L’Eclisse* and *Persona* explore that absence as much as tell their stories. How to show and narrate absence is a crucial component that makes up the essential concerns of the characters in the films as well as the directors. However, this absence will not bring any loose parts together, that is, it does not have an amalgamating function. Similar uses are found in the following example, *Caché*, but their functions are different to the ones discussed here.

### **Absence of causality: *Caché***

Unlike the way they are used in the films discussed above, pauses, absences or inserts can bear a crucial purpose in the narrative and help to form continuity. Thus, the effect of such lacks in the linearity of a narrative is sometimes not to disrupt or intervene, but to construct and unify. In *Caché*, there is an absence that exists throughout the entire film, to the extent that the mystery created in the main storyline remains unresolved. Before moving onto a detailed analysis of this film, it is convenient to explain how such absences can function to unify narratives with a more straightforward example. In *Benny’s Video* (1992), an earlier Michael Haneke film, there is a sequence in the middle of the film that takes place in Egypt. During this sequence, the images on the screen do not carry the narrative forward, but halt it. The

emphasis is on time passing: we are supposed to feel and question the length of those two weeks that the mother and the son are on holiday. The composition of this sequence calls attention to its stylistic qualities instead of its content due to the lack of a strong connection between the succeeding shots in terms of narrative development. Another important function that this sequence has is to remind us of what is happening elsewhere (in Austria) and contrast these two distinct events, namely the holiday and the murder.

It is useful to summarise the film here to understand how this sequence functions in the overall narrative. Benny (Arno Frisch) is a teenager who is obsessed with recording and watching videos to the point of replacing his window with a monitor that shows the twenty-four hour live footage of the view. Coming from an upper-middle class family, he seems to be able to get hold of anything he wants. Indifferent and oblivious to anything else, he spends all his time renting videos, shooting random things with his camera and watching television. While his parents (Angela Winkler and Ulrich Mühe) are away on a weekend, he meets a teenage girl (Ingrid Stassner) at the video store and brings her home to watch videos together. Benny shows the girl the weapon that is used to kill a pig in a slaughterhouse in one of his videos. He then uses this weapon to kill her, apparently for no reason. Benny is not panicked or anxious after the crime he commits; he cold-bloodedly cleans the house and hides the body in the wardrobe. After his parents accidentally find out about the murder by watching Benny's video recordings, they look for ways to help him get away with it. They do not discuss what the reasons behind this crime could be or whether it was an accident. They then agree that Benny's father will get rid of the body while he and his mother go to Egypt on a holiday.

Until this point, the film carries on in a fairly conventional manner. The common expectation would be to 'see' what is happening to the dead body or to have characters refer to it during the holiday sequence. Many films might have used inter-cutting or kept this sequence short, so as to return to the main narrative; any excess would have been unnecessary if it did not support the story. In contrast, the Egypt sequence consists of fragments of scenes: Benny and his mother having dinner and breakfast, going parasailing, watching television in their room, phoning home, wandering around in the market. Dialogue is minimal and there is not a causal relation between the succeeding scenes. We see Benny observing things, recording and watching them afterwards. Furthermore, this sequence is relatively long; and as the story is halted in this sequence, the passing of time is stretched and emphasised.

The lack of a strong causal link between the succeeding scenes and the pause in the main narrative shift the attention from the story to the formal characteristics. The presence of cameras and screens since the beginning of the film urges us to respond to the excessiveness of Benny's recording on holiday. Narration itself becomes 'a mode of description'. The strong emphasis on the repeated images of recording, watching, looking and framing adds another dimension to the story: the family's attitude towards murder is as inhuman and distant as any image produced and witnessed through a camera. The camera in this sequence is not pointing at the events that are happening before it but at the act of shooting, which in fact is one of the main themes in the narrative. It suggests how effective images can be in their ability to divert us from the real event. Watching the mother and son on holiday is similar to the way we watch the teenage girl get killed on the screen. As Benny zaps from one channel to the next in their hotel room, the film provides us with pacifying images. It is impossible not to feel curious about what is happening at home with the

dead body, even though the inserted images direct the attention away from it. Hence, this sequence also questions our own desire to see the violence at home. We are forcefully alienated from the main story: while the father is chopping up the body, we are encouraged to question the indifference of the characters as much as our own interest. This sequence is a pause in the narrative, but its narration is a part of the content and our knowledge of what is happening off-screen gives us access to the depths of the characters' behaviours. What Benny and his mother do in their trip to Egypt does not have significance in the act of moving the story forward: no information is provided about what is happening at home with the body and no incident in Egypt has any effect on the following part of the story. What matters in this sequence is the concealment of a crime: Benny's video keeps on recording and the family decide to continue their life as usual.

The use of off-screen in *Benny's Video* is comparable to that in the final sequence of *L'Eclisse*. As mentioned above, such uses are not uncommon in the history of cinema; mystery and horror films usually experiment with off-screen space in order to create suspense. Anything off-screen is left to our imagination, which makes it a useful tool for re-forming the narrative. Conventionally, though, the use of off-screen space is momentary and is limited to a scene or a shot. In *Benny's Video*, such a use comprises a whole sequence, pointing again at the structure of the film as well as its devices. It is actually the peak in the narrative: the father gets rid of the body of a girl that his son has killed. This horrible scene is not depicted; we are supposed to think and imagine the possibilities. Just as the parents cover the crime that their child has committed, this part of the narrative is also concealed. The difference between the final sequence in *L'Eclisse* and the sequence in Egypt in *Benny's Video* is in our level of knowledge: Haneke provides us with information

about what is happening off-screen, whereas Antonioni cuts the narrative there and then, as if Vittoria has broken free from that world that we were witnessing, or the camera has been diverted to another viewpoint. When a character is introduced, we know that he exists off-frame even if we do not see him. Haneke employs the same approach for one of the most important events in the narrative. We are aware of the event that is happening off-screen. Antonioni, on the other hand, refrains from giving any explanation for the absence of what might normally be a key narrative event.

Haneke's *Caché* (2005) also revolves around similar themes of watching and being watched. *Caché* is about a family that receive surveillance tapes of their life. Information about who recorded and sent the tapes and their motive for doing so remains undisclosed. Moreover, the film hints at the impossibility of such a recording; in doing this, it contradicts and undermines the causality in the narrative.<sup>22</sup> However, with its stylistic elements, the film generates other layers of meaning. Absences and inserts do not produce gaps; they fill in the story.

*Caché* opens with a static long shot of a street; the frame includes a couple of houses, cars and a few people passing by. In the centre is the entrance of a house; almost nothing moves in the image except for some trees and passer-bys; the humming sound in the background suggests the noise of the city. Credits run horizontally as if someone is typing on the screen; their form complements the prevalent immobility, silence and insignificance in the image: nothing is happening. We do not know that this is a video recording until we see the image rewind; the voice-overs do not lead us anywhere.<sup>23</sup> The formal qualities of this image – the static framing, surveillance-like positioning, the reticence in the filmed image – are cues to the following recordings that we will see in later scenes. As the film continues, however, we face the impossibility of separating the recordings from the movie itself.

It is as if segments were cut from the film and replaced to make a new story out of them.

In terms of quality nothing distinguishes the images in the video recordings from the images in the rest of the movie: we assume that they are shot with the same camera, without alterations. The shift from a video recording to a scene is made only by a cut. The only time we can identify a video recording is when we see it being rewound, fast-forwarded or paused. Apart from this, we are intermittently confronted with images that could belong to the movie or to the recordings within the movie. Furthermore, Georges's (Daniel Auteuil's) remembrances and dreams are filmed in the same manner, making it almost impossible to figure out what they are and where they belong. The indecipherability of the context and the nature of the images reflects the film form and points to our struggle to solve this form in order to understand what the story is. Consequently the style contributes to the construction of the narrative.

As the main cause of disturbance, the video recordings are the primary element in the narrative; they drive it forward. The story begins with the conflict they create and develops from the search for the motives behind these recordings. Formally, however, they break the linearity of the story as some of the recordings turn out to be scenes in the film. In one of the tapes, the corridor on the floor of Majid's (Maurice Bénichou's) flat is shot from Georges's point of the view; this is the shot we see when he visits Majid (Figures 3.8 and 3.9). The same shot belongs to the recording and the film, making them inseparable. The videos motivate Georges to remember his past and move the story forward; they lead the narrative and later become the film itself; yet, although their existence forms the main theme in the narrative, the answer behind why they were produced and sent remains unknown.



**Figure 3.8** Corridor shots from the video



**Figure 3.9** Georges' point of view in the film

Thomas Y. Levin writes about the indistinguishability of the film and the surveillance tapes and states that ‘a surveillant activity that was previously the explicit object of attention within the narrative here seemingly has *become* the signature of the film’s narrative activity itself’ (2010: 80). According to him, ‘narration itself is functioning in a surveillant manner’ (79); ‘it is the narration itself that is watching’ (81). Since the tapes transfer from belonging to the fictional world to the film’s narrative activity, as the story unfolds, it becomes futile to question the tapes’ creator.

*Caché* has a conventional narrative in the sense that it follows a linear storyline. This conventionality is broken with the absence of causality. The absence turns what begins as a story of blackmail into a man’s confrontation with his conscience and his past. This absence directs us and the protagonist to something that is not there, that is off-screen.<sup>24</sup> It could be argued then that the main theme in the film builds itself not on the reason behind the tapes, but on their existence. Gilberto

Perez similarly refers to this structure and simply writes, ‘the videotapes in *Caché* trace the narrative path; like the villain in a melodrama, they drive the story forward. For some the film is all about the fear of surveillance, but if that is so, then surveillance is a villain that Haneke identifies with’ (2012). In other words, Perez argues that the videotapes are like a character; they have the power to turn things to different directions and affect the destiny of other characters. In this respect, *Caché* should not be regarded as a whodunit mystery; the film’s form demands attention to the absences in the narrative or what is off-screen. The content of Georges’s conscious and momentary remembrances are not as important as the fact that there are traces in his unconscious related to the images in the tapes and the drawings. The memories that Haneke intends to recall are more than these brief instances. Hence, his use of a static camera in the tape recordings allows us to observe the scenes slowly and encourages us to attend to their details. The form is almost like a painting with minimal action where the length of time devoted to looking at these images leads us to suspect that they contain more than they show. The film will not explain to us why events have happened; the reason remains hidden. As Robin Wood writes,

Haneke ... insists that we be active participants: Nothing is spelled out; we are invited to think, to make connections, to solve the enigmas for ourselves rather than have them explained for us. (2006a: 35)

The reason behind Georges’s suspicions about whether Majid is the blackmailer is one of the main themes in the movie. Something happened between Georges and Majid in the past, but the film does not provide any details, either visually or verbally, until Georges confesses to Anne (Juliette Binoche) about what he has done. Since this is the primary motive behind Georges’s suspicions and since all the videotapes point to that era in his childhood, this piece of information is at the core of the movie: Majid’s parents were among the people that were massacred by the French police on



17 October 1961 in Paris during a protest against the Algerian War. The details of this incident are not dwelled upon further in their conversation; references to it are limited to a simple remark.<sup>25</sup> What we see and hear in the movie is almost like an impression of what the real theme has left behind. Everything that happens in the film is a consequence of related incidents. They happened or still happen off-screen; the family's disturbance and Georges's own questioning of his conscience are just small reverberations of the aftermath. Short scenes in which we see Georges in a state of pointless aggression, such as when he immediately blames the man on the bicycle for being incautious, help to maintain this tension. The movie is about the violence and terror imposed by people on other people.

Instead of being verbally and visually elaborate about this terror, Haneke chooses to create an atmosphere for the audience to meditate about it. The scene right before the finale portrays the core incident evocative of this terror, which triggers Georges's guilt and which perhaps also represents the hidden memory that he does not want to confront consciously. Hence, the indeterminate status of the scene is appropriate; we do not know whether this is Georges's dream, his memory, or even another video-tape (Figure 3.10). This three and a half minute scene starts out quietly with the sound and the image of chickens in front of the farmhouse where Georges



**Figure 3.10** Little Majid sent away by Georges's parents

spent his childhood. A green car enters the frame from the right corner and makes a turn to park in front of the house. A woman gets out and enters the house while the driver waits for her in front of the car. The woman comes out with a suitcase followed by little Majid escorted by Georges's parents. Before anybody attempts to put him in the car, Majid starts to run to the right, towards what seems to be the entrance of the yard. Majid runs as far as out of the frame, followed by the woman and the driver who succeed in catching him there. Meanwhile, the only two characters in the image are Georges's parents who stand still and look. A moment later, Georges's mother takes comfort in her husband's arms, a gesture that appears to suggest her anguish. The driver and the woman return with Majid in their arms. The child continues to shout, fight back and kick, a sight that Georges's mother no longer can bear to witness. As her husband takes her inside, the driver forcefully pushes the child inside the car, which then drives away from where it entered with the continuing sound of Majid's protest. Throughout the scene, the camera never moves. It is situated in what seems to be a garage across the house. The event takes place in the distance; it is impossible to see the characters' facial expressions. Needless to say, such a form resembles the former surveillance video-tapes we have seen in the film. However, the absence of Georges in the scene hints at the possibility that this is his point of view.<sup>26</sup> The distance of the camera can also signify that this is a long forgotten memory: Georges knows what happened that day; Majid was sent away because of Georges's lies amidst his heart breaking protests. The camera's distance, its immobility and the dominating tranquillity in the space contrast the scene's content. A child is being sent to an orphanage, forcefully taken from his home because of false accusations. The scene does not show the event in detail, but its impact is powerful because it invites us to be a witness to the crime. This event,

undetailed in the distance, may as well recall many similar instances in different parts of the world. Georges's guilt is transferred to the people who are watching and it transforms from being personal to global. The affect of this scene is made possible with the film's structure. It is the placement of the anonymous video tapes in the narrative and the unresolved mystery behind them that enrich the meaning in this scene.

If there were no unsigned tapes sent to the family in *Caché*, there would not be a story. As in a conventional story, suspense and mystery develop from the existence of discomfort, which, in this case, is caused by the anonymity of the tapes. Unlike a conventional story, however, *Caché* maintains that anonymity until the end. Furthermore, with its style, the film eliminates the question of who made the tapes. If



**Figure 3.11** Shot from the film

**Figure 3.12** Shot from hidden camera

the hidden camera were positioned on the street or in Majid's flat, it would have to be put on a tripod or placed on the shelves against the wall (Figures 3.11 and 3.12). By showing us the impossibility of a camera recording from where the images were taken, the film says something about their reality in the film world. The tapes could not have been recorded by anyone; they are just there. An intervention from outside the fictional world actually constructs the backbone of the narrative.<sup>27</sup> As the impossibility of the presence of a blackmailer is affirmed, we demand an explanation, which lies in the depths of everybody's unconscious. As D. I. Grossvogel argues, 'it

is *Hidden's camera* that tells us about collective and individual guilt, *not* the narrative, because Haneke has placed no mediator between us and his lens' (2007: 42). The tapes urge the protagonist and us to remember and confront the issues that have remained hidden.<sup>28</sup>

The final shot in the film is important in that it too directs us to the absence of causality in the narrative. Its function is similar to that of the opening shot. Groups of students are walking, standing and chatting on the steps of the entrance of Pierot's (Lester Makedonsky's), Georges's son's, school (Figure 3.13). The similarity is not related to the content, though; in fact the two images are noticeably different. Due to



**Figure 3.13** Pierot and Majid's son at the left hand side of the frame

the scarcity of people on the street, the opening shot reinforces the suspicion that this is a surveillance tape, whereas the final one draws attention to the camera's existence in this crowded place. A minute into the scene, Pierot comes out of the school with Majid's son. Passing among other students, Majid's son seem wary, looking around to make sure no one suspicious sees them together. They chat for a while and depart. Needless to mention, we neither hear their conversation nor can we understand from their body language the terms of their relationship. As these characters exit the scene, credits slowly start to run on the image. The immobility of the camera and its viewpoint are common features of both the opening and the ending scenes; they

signal the possibility that they are video recordings. Although we find out immediately after the opening scene that it is a recording, we never know whether the final one is; it remains ambiguous.<sup>29</sup> The film's narrative demands that we differentiate between the blackmail video recordings and the film's own images because the story builds itself on the blackmail. However, there is no distinction between the two and, no matter how we try to impose this distinction, the film resists explanation or interpretation. Haneke's choice not to distinguish them points to the lack of causality in his narrative. The tension in the film is not only caused by a desire to find out who recorded and sent the tapes, but is also dependent on the affinity of style between the two images. The narrative refrains from providing a clear answer as to who the blackmailer is and the form supports this absence by not providing a clear distinction between the filmic, the dream and the recorded scenes.

The narrative of *Caché* is based on absence and interference, and the style in the film supports this. It points to forgetting, hiding or not confronting and the only way to remember is through interference. The film tells a story about a collective trauma by means of a personal one; in order to come to terms with it, the suppressed memory of the trauma has to be confronted.<sup>30</sup> Normally, Georges would probably not admit his responsibility for a crime committed in his country and the consequences such a crime may have brought; he would probably reject any suggestion that his childhood incident has anything to do with it. Yet Haneke forces his protagonist to take a look at his own life from someone else's point of view and then delivers him segments from a memory in the future only to make him face hidden incidents of the past. The contents of such incidents are as subtle and ordinary as the style of the video recordings: the scene in which Majid is taken away to the orphanage and the brief inserts of Majid beheading a chicken or Majid with blood around his mouth.

These images are short compared to the film's duration. They do not show anything in detail and they do not answer the questions we have been asking, such as what prompted the blackmail or what really happened between Majid and Georges in the past. Using the video recordings as the central knot in the narrative which is never untied, *Caché* points at a man's confrontation with his past. The fact that the film's and the recordings' images are almost indistinguishable and that we know the impossibility of having a camera recording those images invalidates the main question that the film is urging us to ask: 'Who is behind the blackmail?' is rendered rhetorical. If there is any one behind the blackmail, that is Haneke and he is telling us that this is a fictional film. We follow a story whose main cause is in fact absent.

Unlike the previous examples, in *Caché*, the natural characteristic of absence is lost; instead of creating the fleeting nature of a time-in-between, the absence becomes a disturbing central element in the narrative. It is a suspense case to be scrutinised; not a slight omission as part of the natural flow of things. Absence is used to form the continuity in the story.

## **Conclusion**

As discussed in detail in Chapter One, because of the photographic realism in the medium and the objective of storytelling, cinema produces relevant expectations; continuity and – consequently – discontinuity are defined in relation to these expectations. The features of photographic realism make us demand that there is a continuity in aspects such as narration, form or point of view and that they coherently construct rules for a fictional world. Bonitzer calls this demand: 'The automatic ideological action which inaugurates our viewing of a film, our experience of the projection' and explains its function as 'invest[ing] the *surface* of the screen with a

fictive *depth*. This depth denotes the reality within the fiction, the reality of the fiction' (1990: 291). Any changes in this construction, 'this fictive depth', are regarded as discontinuity. Similarly, cinematic storytelling produces an expectation of a linear and continuous narrative. Time and movement are as fundamental to the cinematic medium as photographic realism and storytelling, yet discontinuity cannot be discussed in relation to them as all films are made to be screened in a certain duration, without interruptions. Film narration is continuous; we name films discontinuous only because of shifts in expectations, demands or perspectives regarding the coherence of the fictional world and cinematic conventions.

An omission or an interruption in spatiality, temporality and causality, or an interference in the established narrative order of the fictional world typically startle audiences. This is because cinematic conventions determine that there is narrative unity throughout a film. Lack of specific information that is invaluable for the completion of a story, loose connections between scenes and abandoned plots create a sense of incompleteness hence discontinuity. The intention of this chapter was to explore such instances through detailed case studies in order to discuss the various ways in which absence can be utilised in films' narratives. In *L'Eclisse* absence manifests itself as a halt in the storyline; it is as if the film's narrative has taken a pause, looking for a direction to go. Similarly, the subject matter is about a pause in Vittoria's life; she also seems directionless. *Persona* presents absence as an interference in its forward-moving causality. Although the established causal linkages in the film are quite weak, the visual crack halfway through disrupts what linkages there are. In *Caché*, absence does not only exist as an omission of causality, but it also becomes a theme from which the story evolves.<sup>31</sup> In the first two

examples, absences break the narrative unity, making it difficult for the audience to follow the storylines whereas in the last one, absence has a conjoining function.

*L'Eclisse* has some similarities to *Eternal Sunshine*, which I discussed in the previous chapter. *L'Eclisse* has a narrative that is seemingly made up of random scenes that do not lead anywhere. This film is best described by its causally independent scenes, a characteristic shared also by *Eternal Sunshine*. While the scenes in *L'Eclisse* are chronological, there are no definite temporal marks assigned to most of the disconnected instances in *Eternal Sunshine*. Interestingly, however, the scenes in the former have a more detached feel. This is because while *L'Eclisse* calls attention to absence, *Eternal Sunshine* dissolves absence in its unusual structure. In both examples, absence is an organic element in the filmic world, but *L'Eclisse* invites us to try to see beyond what is on the screen whereas *Eternal Sunshine* abandons the necessity to investigate its gaps. This is related to the fact that there is no resolution at the end of *L'Eclisse*, while the narrative of *Eternal Sunshine* resolves itself, thus approximating a more classical structure. Moreover, the effect of non-linearity and absence is reduced by the existence of the memory erasure procedure in the latter film. *L'Eclisse* presents absence as a disruption of the causality, temporality and spatiality and a diversion from a linear and orderly moving narrative while *Eternal Sunshine* utilises it as part of the continuity in the filmic world.

*Persona*'s use of absence is different from this common structure, while still comparable to that of *L'Eclisse*. The film offers no explanations for its causal gaps. Numerous questions regarding the details of the relationship between the two women in *Persona* and their residence in the island remain unresolved. Similarly, Vittoria's true feelings after the break-up and the reasons behind her actions are not explained in *L'Eclisse*. The final sequence of *L'Eclisse* is somewhat similar to the cracking



sequence in the middle of *Persona* in that it abandons any established story so far. The difference is in their effects: the former does it smoothly whereas the latter is aggressive. In both films, absences come out as discontinuities. In the final example of this chapter, *Caché*, however, absence functions differently because it contributes to the completion and coherence of the narrative. Absence is one of the main subjects in the story; in this sense, style is parallel with the subject in the film. The function of absence in this example evokes the non-linear narratives in the previous chapter. Just as the non-linearity and fragmentation in *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine* stood for the memory condition of the protagonist and the memory erasure process respectively, absence in *Caché* points to Georges's ignored childhood incident and his reluctance to confront it together with its consequences. As the film's title suggests, what Georges is literally looking for, the blackmailer, is *hidden* and will not be found. This is a deliberate and powerful narrative choice on which the film is centred. However, the concealment of this information fortifies the depth of our inspection of the protagonist's conscience rather than leaving us ill-informed. In other words, absence in this final example emphasises one of the strongest subjects in the narrative by leading us to ask how and why the videotapes were made, and, finally, why the film never provides an answer to these questions.

Structures that give way to such ambiguities are not uncommon, for instance, in European modernist films, such as the ones discussed here, or films influenced by them such as those of the New Hollywood in the 1970s. In *8 ½* (Federico Fellini, 1963) we witness the constant transition from reality to fantasy without being sure what belongs where; in *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970), the protagonist's past is never completely revealed, though it appears to be the reason behind his discontent. These films often make use of absences and discontinuities in order to disrupt filmic

engagement; contemporary discontinuity films, on the other hand, are distinguished from these examples in the sense that they exaggerate their actual discontinuity, while conversely using it to construct the continuity in the films. The style of *L'Eclisse* does not make absences the focus of the story; they remain unresolved. This is an organic absence that is not unnaturally obvious, as in *Caché*; it creates the atmosphere for alienation, misunderstanding and miscommunication. In *L'Eclisse* the absence is unconstrained and diverts the narrative continuity, whereas in *Caché*, the unresolved blackmail incident is the primary element in the narrative that moves it forward. One could conclude that, borrowing these once radical stylistic choices, contemporary films use them in a more controlled and structured way. Resistance to conventions may no longer be possible because dismantling conventional elements of style has become such common practice, a part of the mainstream, rarely regarded as unusual or new.<sup>32</sup> Unconventional stylistic choices are integrated in the stories and have thematic functions. Conventions are broken in order to direct audiences rather than decentre their attention and engagement. In effect, this is another type of montage, the montage of stylistic elements. In this sense, absences and discontinuities do not produce holes; they produce continuities.

Furthermore, the random realistic look borrowed from documentary practice and neorealism frequently found in the modernist examples of this thesis is something the contemporary examples lack. Describing this style, Stanley Cavell writes, 'Early in its history the cinema discovered the possibility of *calling* attention to persons and parts of persons and objects; but it is equally a possibility of the medium not to call attention to them but, rather, to let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight' (1979: 25). Bazin's thoughts on the use of deep focus and the long take are similar; such use transfers to us the choice of

where to look and see. John David Rhodes refers to ‘the *freedom* that Bazin relishes in neorealist cinema’ as ‘a *coercion* to discern, to judge, to interpret’ (2006: 19). However, there is obviously a difference between the long take of Haneke and the long take of Antonioni. Rhodes argues that ‘The phenomenal plenitude of these [Haneke’s or *Code Unknown*’s] shots is such that they undermine the purposes that Bazin imagines for realist cinematography’; he continues, ‘The plenitude of the real (of the shot) tries our capacity to make out what is significant in this shot. The world may be too rich in facts for us to discern which are important’ (20). The plenitude of Haneke’s shots is not entirely dependent on their duration, but also on their staging. The carefully orchestrated movements of people in relation to space and to each other give the shots a more controlled feeling than those of Antonioni’s.<sup>33</sup> Although most of Haneke’s long takes, such as the opening street sequence of *Code Unknown*, are, as Robin Wood writes, ‘without a single cut or any discernible “faking”’ (2003: 42), it is their perfection that assigns them an unnatural schema. Each shot seems purposefully designed to serve the narrative, even though its contribution to the story may seem remote. Whereas in a film like *L’Eclisse*, the form feels looser; one senses that there is room for randomness and chance. The film proceeds as if we actually watch Monica Vitti randomly encountering things and incidents on the streets of Rome. The well-organised shots in *Caché*, on the other hand, do not admit randomness and coincidences; characters exist and incidents happen for a grand purpose. One senses a guiding presence in the staging.

*L’Eclisse* and *Persona* resist the conventional habit of providing information in full, with minimum gaps. They create a narrational perspective from which to explore the facts rather than facts themselves; hence they are more open to interpretation. The narratives are, however, incomplete and unsustainable; whereas

the contemporary films discussed in this thesis have more controlled and contracted narratives. *Eternal Sunshine*'s fragmented structure directs us towards a centre; *Persona*'s structure is dispersed from the centre to the peripheries. *L'Eclisse* takes us from one point towards the other without necessarily giving a reason for it. By using discontinuity, the contemporary examples hold our attention within certain limits of the narrative, whereas the earlier examples encourage us to explore beyond those limits. As Susan Sontag writes,

Take the matter of information. One tactic upheld by traditional narrative is to give 'full' information, so that the ending of the viewing or reading experience coincides, ideally, with full satisfaction of one's desire to 'know', to understand what happened and why. (This is, of course, a highly manipulated quest for knowledge. It's the business of the artist to convince his audience that what they haven't learned at the end they can't know, or shouldn't care about knowing.) But one of the salient features of new narratives is a deliberate, calculated frustration of the desire to 'know'. (1967: 188)

Sontag describes the audience's desire to know and the new narratives she writes about are evident in modernist examples. Contemporary examples similarly manipulate this desire to know but direct it towards understanding the style. Following the style nourishes the desire to know. Absence and fragmentation are controlled in these examples and made into elements that function to create continuity. The missing parts that we would conventionally label as ellipses do not affect the coherence of the narrative. The films provide certainty rather than ambiguity. These examples of a controlled and systematic discontinuity serve the obsession for continuity and meaning instead of inviting interpretations.<sup>34</sup> The fragmented narrative of *Eternal Sunshine* does not open up to multiple readings and stories as *Persona* does. We can follow *Caché*'s discontinuous style more easily than *Persona*'s; even though there are gaps in the story, we do not feel the urge to complete them.

As mentioned at the start of this section, films have a built-in continuous nature. No matter how loose the connections between scenes, there is an imposed order and duration by which we are led to construct a story or at least some kind of connecting pattern. This is due to the time-based characteristic of the medium. Telling one thing after another, placing one image after another, inevitably creates a sequence, even though the images may be irrelevant. Within this built-in continuity, film style can affect what seems to be a discontinuous narrative. At the expense of ruining the unity of time, space and causality, style can offer a significant story element in order to support coherence. In *Memento*, for instance, the telling of the story is an illustration of the protagonist's memory condition. In *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel experiences his memory-trip in a fragmented way. *Caché*'s absence of causality signifies the hidden and buried guilt in Georges' conscience. These examples show that there are cases in which disregarding narrative unity may not always inhibit the spectators from following the story, but may indeed contribute to their understanding of it. In other words, the lack of continuity is not always equivalent to losing meaning and coherence. These contemporary examples integrate such uses into the continuity of the story, eliminating the effect of a break or a disruption. Discontinuity becomes a central thematic and stylistic element in the film on which the story is built. The repetition of an aberrant use of style perhaps affects our understanding of it; most of these choices are merely unconventional and new but they smoothly fit into the films' narratives. Indeed, such uses operate in different ways; one distinction is the level of visibility and, consequently, the level of incorporation in the story. Once the use becomes more noticeable, it is likely that it becomes an important factor in the story itself. Another distinction is the use of a repetitive pattern in the film. In all these

contemporary examples there is a noticeable and developing style of discontinuity which offers a pattern, which itself then makes the narratives easier to follow.

It is evident that discontinuity has different forms, functions and meanings in different films and contexts. The next two chapters examine this issue further and present a variety of examples from different periods of cinema. The emphasis of Chapter Four is on film narration and how upsetting film narration can affect our engagement with film narratives. The chapter investigates discontinuity in regard to shifting narrations and provides a further comparison of earlier discontinuity films with contemporary counterparts.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 'The same word, *contar*, means in Spanish both to count and to tell; *compter* and *conter* are almost the same in French, as are *zählen* and *erzählen* in German' (Perez 2000: 50).

<sup>2</sup> Borges's experience in 'The Aleph' is appropriate to summarise this situation: 'What my eyes saw was simultaneous: what I shall describe is successive, because language is successive. Nevertheless, I shall cull something of it all' (1967: 150).

<sup>3</sup> Understanding the experience of watching early films seems to be dominated by and limited to Gorky's descriptions. Numerous writers refer to him including Mulvey (2006: 36), Christie (1994: 15), Burch (1990: 23-24) and Gunning (1997a: 117-118). Gorky's original account is a 1896 newspaper article; for its translation see Leyda (1983).

<sup>4</sup> Cavell simply explains this: 'I am present not at something happening, which I must confirm, but at something that has happened, which I absorb (like a memory)' (1979: 26).

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Kahrs' explanatory note for this painting in the exhibition *The Painting of Modern Life*, at The Hayward, Southbank Centre, London, 4 October-30 December 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Although there is no single interpretation for any work of art, modernist works aim to extend the possibilities for multiple interpretations rather than restricting them towards a singular meaning. James Collins argues that the modernist text 'employs various strategies to resist commodification, usually by resisting the use of codes comprehensible to their audience' (1987: 17). As in literature, modernism in music and the visual arts manifests itself in the form of resisting conventions and offering alternative stylistic techniques against established norms. Stream of consciousness, most famously associated with Joyce and Woolf, is in fact an abandonment of proper forms of language and writing, and it compares to atonality in music, which is the absence of a central tone, evident in Varèse and Schönberg's compositions. In fact, Susan Sontag likens the structure and method of Schönberg to Godard's filmmaking (Sontag 2002: 150). In cinema, the period that is mostly associated with these kinds of experiments is probably the New Wave. Many films from this period, including those of Truffaut, Godard and Rivette do not necessarily have a style that works to construct a linear, easily comprehensible and continuous narrative. One of the extreme examples of such a style is *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, discussed in the previous chapter, in which absences intentionally decentre us from the story. The style in *Marienbad* works to invalidate any conviction that we might start to form about the narrative. What Robert Self writes in reference to Henry James's novel *The Turn of the Screw* applies for *Marienbad*: '[it] creates a narrative reality that asks to be read in its ambiguity' (1979: 74).

<sup>7</sup> This brings us back to Bonitzer's argument about the classical cinema's obsession with the ideology of realism: 'Everything must work towards the effacing of the simulacrum of representation as such and its *gain in reality*. Reality is the endpoint, the stop-catch around which the system winds and shuts' (1990: 197).

<sup>8</sup> This does not apply to musicals in which genre conventions allow for extremes. Leo Braudy writes 'Musicals, of all genre films, place that self-consciousness at the heart of their plots, themes, motifs, and characterizations' (1983:13). He compares *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966) in terms of their 'similar concerns about what makes film different from the other arts' (14). The self-consciousness in musicals is regarded as normal and continuous whereas it is seen as an anomaly and disruption in fiction films.

<sup>9</sup> Eco (1993: 145). This is the plot pattern for 'an Antonioni film'. In his 1963 essay 'Make Your Own Movie', Umberto Eco envisions a future in 1993 where means of filmmaking are easily accessible to anyone. 'Plot patterns' of famous directors are revealed in bestselling books and people can easily shoot their own 'director's film' only by changing the variants in these patterns.

<sup>10</sup> 'Antonioni made his wonderful remark after a visit to Mark Rothko's studio. What he said exactly was, "Your paintings are like my films – they're about nothing ... with precision."' (Chatman 1985: 54)

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed reading of the film through Vittoria's interactions with the objects and the surroundings in the city see Arrowsmith (1995).

<sup>12</sup> The original essay is Gilman (1962).

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<sup>13</sup> Many moments in this scene including this one are absent moments. They seem to be unrehearsed, unscripted and impulsive reactions achieved by Vitti's being in the role. They are similar to what Andrew Klevan calls the 'in-between' (2011). Klevan refers to brief moments like these, and offers criticisms of films including *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1939) and *La Peau douce* (François Truffaut, 1964) through these moments' close analyses.

Likewise V. F. Perkins wonderfully observes the impact of a passing moment in *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949) when a woman leans on a table and says, 'No, no, no, no! Just play the same tune again. Same tune again!' The woman stays for a few seconds in the frame while James Mason passes in front of her, but we hear her words clearly. Perkins explains how this moment 'marks a stage where what seemed settled is about to be cast back into jeopardy' (2003). The tension is going to start again and this is a mark of the repetitive theme.

Richard Dyer makes similar observations about Lana Turner's performance in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959). He refers to the scene in which Lora (Lana Turner) discusses with David his new play while Annie silently serves drinks to them almost like a silent shadow. Dyer argues that '[Lora] sees taking the part of the social worker as doing something more "real" on the stage, yet cheerfully chats about its "coloured angle" with David in front of Annie, without consulting *her*, without even seeming to register the fact that Annie is serving them drinks (1992: 96).

These moments then, no matter how insignificant they may seem, have an impact on the films' stories.

<sup>14</sup> This is an example that stands out of the group of films that Bonitzer describes as displaying 'the fear of a hole'. Instead of restricting the viewer within the realism of the filmic world, it allows for imagination beyond the frame.

<sup>15</sup> Dead time is created on purpose and it is a source for randomness in Antonioni's films. In an interview in 1975, Antonioni says, '(S)ometimes I like to shoot beyond that scene. Once the actors have done all they had to say, they still keep on going, by force of inertia, until they hit what I call "dead moments." At these moments actors often commit "errors," which in some way are also part of the scene' (Mancini et. al 1996: 174).

<sup>16</sup> For the most extensive and inclusive reference book up to date on Ingmar Bergman see Steene (2005).

<sup>17</sup> *Persona* was made during the Vietnam War and the film refers to both World War 2 and Vietnam. Elisabet watches footage of a Buddhist monk burning himself; with a terrified look on her face, she slowly walks backwards from the screen to rest her back in the corner of the room. In another scene, she finds a photograph depicting children and women at gunpoint by Nazi soldiers who are presumably evacuating the building in the background. Bergman zooms in to this picture for some time, finding multiple images and instances from the same photograph, forcing us to examine it closely. For a discussion of Bergman's use of this photograph, see Ohlin (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Lev Manovich elaborates the idea of narrative as 'database' in the context of digital media in *The Language of New Media* (2001).

<sup>19</sup> One of the most influential and referenced essays on *Persona* is Susan Sontag's. Sontag suggests that 'with *Persona*, it is the temptation to invent more "story" that has to be resisted' (1967: 187) and this approach has been criticised or praised by numerous writers. Pauline Kael suggests that offering interpretations is to 'demonstrate ingenuity at guess work' (1968: 172). Paisley Livingston argues that even though Sontag 'gives up the possibility of interpreting the film...she then proceeds to offer an interpretation (1982: 200). Writing in 1998, Robin Wood's reply to Sontag is 'To claim that a film not only cannot but *should not* be interpreted seems to me simply another form of evasion' (248). I find Sontag's claims helpful in directing the viewer not towards understanding and producing one meaning but towards discussing many.

<sup>20</sup> Many psychoanalytical readings of the film point to the use of improper language and silence as a resistance to patriarchal order. See Blackwell (1997) and Sitney (1990). Orr (1998) on the other hand, takes the motif of the double and explores a number of films made afterwards which were presumably influenced by *Persona*.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabet speaks only once out of fear when Alma threatens to pour a pot of boiling water down her face.

<sup>22</sup> Both Wheatley (2006) and Saxton (2007) draw attention to the impossibility of camera angles of the video recordings.



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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Elsaesser calls this ‘the experience of an ontological switch [...] where on-screen space is reframed by sound-over’ (2010: 63). This is a situation in which the audience believes to be watching an image that takes place in a certain time and space. However, by the use of sound, the film re-assigns different temporal and spatial characteristics to that image. He argues that the ontological switch is ‘typical of the mind-game film (64)’, a category that he coins for these types of films, which is discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>24</sup> In her article, Saxton (2007) provides a detailed discussion of how the film utilises off-screen space, comparing the different analyses of this concept by Bazin, Burch, Deleuze and Bonitzer.

<sup>25</sup> For an evaluation of the film in terms of its treatment of these events see Virtue (2011).

<sup>26</sup> The images of little Majid in this dark space beheading a chicken are inserted briefly a few times in the film, but we never know whether these are Georges’s distorted memories or reality.

<sup>27</sup> Wheatley (2006) proposes that it is the director behind the blackmail.

<sup>28</sup> A psychoanalytical reading of the film would propose that the existence of the tapes is uncanny. An image is seen that reminds us of something we have experienced, but have long forgotten and it is buried in the depth of our unconscious. Such a reading perhaps would also argue that the trauma is reflected through the blending of memory, dream and reality.

<sup>29</sup> Elsaesser argues that ‘by refusing the reverse-shot’, Haneke introduces ‘the space in front, first theorized by Noël Burch in the 1970s and occasionally exploited by avant-garde filmmakers. This space in front is not what is in front of the camera, the profilmic space, but rather the space in front of the screen, the space in front of the image, but also part of the image – if such a space is conceivable’ (2010: 65).

<sup>30</sup> Gilberto Perez similarly writes: ‘Georges’s personal guilty secret is the nation’s guilty secret’ (2012).

<sup>31</sup> In a recent article in *Sight and Sound*, Mark Cousins uses the terms ‘portrait film’ and ‘cine-portraiture’ for those films in which ‘space and time become polarised. One keeps running and the other slows down or stops’ (2013: 17). Comparing the work of the director to that of a portrait painter he writes: ‘[David Lynch’s] *Inland Empire* is like one very long *Psycho* shower scene. The positioning of its sequences, like the order of the shots in the shower scene, is not determined by the story engine. [...] They’re not where they are because of logic but because of tonality, a bit like Cézanne’s *petites sensations*’ (17). *Inland Empire* is a radical example, but his definition of cine-portraiture is fitting for what I call films that explore absence.

<sup>32</sup> Recently, independent narrative cinema has tended towards mainstream; *Little Miss Sunshine* (Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, 2006), for instance, was a box-office success and won two Oscars. An example of dissolving resistance in mainstream is *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), which applies ‘consumerism’, which it severely criticises in its story, to its production, distribution and exhibition. Some postmodern films with discontinuous and fragmented styles, such as *Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003 and 2004), attract audiences for pure visual entertainment. Unconventionality does not belong specifically to counterculture anymore. However, films that are visually continuous offer an alternative to mainstream conventions and continuity editing through the use of long takes and slow pacing. Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Béla Tarr and Tsai Ming-liang are some notable directors that use this style of filmmaking. Instead of directing the audience towards where to look by cutting to alternative shots in a scene, they choose to direct scenes in single takes and give the audience the freedom to look.

<sup>33</sup> In a letter to Antonioni, Barthes writes that he ‘look[s] at things radically, until [he has] exhausted them... [T]o look longer than expected disturbs established orders of every kind, to the extent that normally the time of the look is controlled by society’ (1997: 67-68). The use of such a look in Haneke’s films usually produce disturbance, which parallels the films’ subjects.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Self takes the example of *3 Women* (Robert Altman, 1977) and demonstrates how a systematical use of ambiguity can in fact generate multiple texts in art cinema without seeming excessive. Whereas in classical cinema, he argues, such a use may seem redundant if it is not contained within the cause and effect chain and ‘the film reveals its distress as an excess of psychological and ideological heterogeneity; story begins to show the seams of plot and technique’ (1979: 79).

## **Chapter Four**

### **UPSETTING NARRATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The previous two chapters introduced some of the most obvious examples of discontinuity: Chapter Two considered films that have non-linear narratives; Chapter Three focused on the ways in which absence is used to tell stories. The first group of films mostly rely on editing to shuffle filmic time. Although they destroy conventional temporal unity, as discussed in the previous chapters, some of these examples do not produce a discontinuity effect. On the other hand, the case studies in Chapter Three mostly disregard consistent and reliable causal connections between scenes. Withholding essential information, they point to subjects beyond their apparent storylines, which challenges the reality of the fictional worlds. As shown through their analyses, the functions and effects of absences in these films are varied and they do not always disrupt continuity and coherence. Unlike these examples, the films considered in this chapter do not readily exhibit discontinuity. The temporal, spatial and causal unity of films that are discussed here remain, seemingly, intact. In most of these case studies, there is a linear narrative that follows a logical chain of events and adheres to the established causal and spatial limits of the fictional world. What these films have in common is the unusual ways in which they narrate their stories. Whether it is an unconventional use of a stylistic element, an alternation between fiction and non-fiction or a shift to different genre conventions, all the films evaluated in this chapter unsettle expected principles of cinematic narration.

The case studies in the previous chapters introduced the concept of discontinuity; the ones discussed here further exemplify the overall investigation of

whether discontinuity is a valid critical term to use when analysing films that look 'less discontinuous'. Therefore, this chapter contains more case analyses from different periods in the history of cinema, films which do not readily disrupt established narrative unities. However, the aim of this chapter is to examine how we can read these films looking primarily at their discontinuities. What is the contribution of the interaction of fiction and non-fiction in *Viaggio in Italia* (Roberto Rossellini, 1954), for instance, to our understanding and appreciation of the film? Can we compare a film like *Tirez sur la pianiste* (François Truffaut, 1960), which fluctuates between different genre conventions, with an unusual western such as *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), in terms that acknowledge an intrusion within the limits of the fictional world? How do these intrusions, even if minor, affect the films' stories? As the chapter attends to these questions, it also investigates how discontinuity is related to common expectations from a film narrative. One famous example is the impact of *Psycho*'s (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) switch of central character from Marion (Janet Leigh) to Norman (Anthony Perkins). A less discussed example is the blurring of fictional world, dream and fantasy in *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1970). Changes or intrusions such as these will also be considered in relation to a genre which includes a switching between different narrative modes, the musical.

This chapter comprises, then, a variety of examples that help position the concept of discontinuity more precisely. The contemporary examples of this chapter also stand out from their companions because they also do not exhibit an immediate discontinuity in terms of narrative unity. *Dogville* and *Manderlay* do not fit in with the recent discussion of puzzle films or database narratives referred to in the Introduction of this thesis. However, the unusual way they use an element of style, soundstages as the film's sets (and settings), justifies a discussion of these films in

relation to an investigation of the concept of discontinuity. As with the films mentioned above, *Dogville* and *Manderlay* challenge conventions of film narrative. The analyses of them in this chapter function to exemplify how stylistic choices produce new possibilities in narration and contribute to our understanding and reading of films. Generally, the expectation is that narration follows a pattern and sets limits of a narrative unity of the fictional world. This chapter examines cases that confuse this expectation and considers what functions they serve.

### **The Interaction of Fiction and Non-fiction: *Viaggio in Italia* and *Une femme est une femme***

Even though they have a linear narrative, some films have temporal, spatial or causal shifts in the way they present their fictional worlds to us, that is, in their narration. These disruptions sometimes find form as a combination of two incongruous viewpoints, a mix of different genre conventions or a sudden break in the story's mood. They require the audience to re-view and re-construct the elements of the story as they transform typical expectations. Such uses are often stylistic choices that visually mark the narratives in which ambiguity, disturbance and confusion are usually important factors. The function of these disruptions, therefore, is pertinent to understanding of the narratives; nevertheless, they usually play with visual expectations. The history of cinema contains examples of such uses that range from very obvious shifts to slight nuances almost concealed in the forward-moving narrative. Many films, from a variety of contexts and categories, make use of discontinuity in different forms, so much so that this discontinuity eventually becomes a part of the narrative continuity. One condition for continuity is the extent that a style corresponds with this filmic world's reality: any interference with the

unity of temporal, spatial and causal connections is assessed as discontinuity. The films studied in the previous chapters exemplify this argument. Another condition is the consistency of the way this filmic world is narrated to us. In other words, in some films, even though there is a narrative unity, narration intermittently shifts, urging us to question again the credibility of that narrative unity. One example of this type of discontinuity manifests itself as an interaction of fiction and non-fiction, which is frequently created by a shift from a seemingly objective point of view that produces documentary-like images to more fictively constructed scenes.

This type of discontinuity is evident in Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia*, in its alternating ways of presenting the filmic world. The film's unconventional style is not actually due to its loose and episodic narrative structure; its content also startles us, as there is hardly any material that we could describe as a story.<sup>1</sup> José Luis Guarner claims that *Viaggio in Italia* 'is not a tragedy [...], not a comedy [...], not a documentary and it does not fit into any conventional classifications' (1970: 58). He categorises the film as being 'about reality and time' (58) or 'about time and duration' (57), evident in the opening where we come in 'on something that was already going on, as we do in real life' (57). Similarly, Laura Mulvey describes it as 'a cinematic world in which plot and character would no longer be the only determinants of what happened on the screen. The diegetic space [the characters] have entered is porous, blurred at the edges and, temporally, is held in suspense' (2000: 100). *Viaggio in Italia* combines fiction and non-fiction in such an explicit way that the film sometimes seems to abandon its story, especially in those instances where non-fiction images are inserted in the narrative. Such a stylistic choice affects the accessibility of the story. 'Neorealism discovers in Rossellini the style and the resources of abstraction', writes André Bazin and he explains that the meaning in neorealist film is

‘*a posteriori*, to the extent that it permits our awareness to move from one fact to another, from one fragment of reality to the next’ (2005: 99). In this sense, the meaning in *Viaggio in Italia* is delivered through a passage that is constructed by the shift between fiction and non-fiction.

The film’s abstracted story can be summarised in a sentence: a married couple, Katherine and Alex Joyce, (Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders) find time to reflect separately upon their problematic relationship during a trip they take to southern Italy to sell a house they have inherited from their late uncle. The transformation that the characters are going through is portrayed mostly in those moments when they are apart; what we learn about these characters we learn less from their language and attitude in the presence of each other and more from their encounters with other people and places: the film shows us what Katherine and Alex look at and how they look at those things, what they say and do and how they say and do it. These images slowly help us build a partial understanding of what they may be thinking without any utterance or affirmation of emotions from the characters.

One significant way of revealing the characters’ interiority in *Viaggio in Italia* is through the inserts of documentary-like shots. Laura Mulvey calls them “‘montage” sequences’ (2000: 103) and Peter Bondanella states that ‘Rossellini avoids the traditional Hollywood shot/reaction shot’ (1993: 103) in these scenes. Alternatively, I take these shots to be a different version, a combination of these two methods. Placed after a medium close-up of a character looking off-screen, these images re-produce the typical counter-shot and indicate the object(s) towards which the character’s look is directed. In a similar way, Guarner observes that the film ‘uses the *contrechamp* [...] not to give a subjective view of the character’s field of vision, but as the objective picture of a piece of reality which is at that time affecting the

character' (1970: 60). This is a recurring stylistic choice throughout the film, especially used during the scenes where Katherine is driving in the car. Frequently, we see her behind the steering wheel in the first shots; the confining medium close-up reinforces her physical isolation in the car from the external world. As she pensively observes what is outside, there is a cut to presumably what she is observing. In the subsequent shots, the camera freely records what it sees: buildings, animals, people by the road, on busy streets, walking or standing.<sup>2</sup> The camera's existence is obvious: most people look at it. This detail is one of the strongest components that affect our expectations; it readily interferes in the world of fiction and breaks the established rules.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the dichotomy of fiction against non-fiction is set. However, this dichotomy is misleading as those non-fictional images are as much a part of the film's fictional narrative as the others.

The film's main motif of the conflict between the mystery of death and faith in life is intensely reflected in these shot/counter-shot patterns. The seemingly uninterrupted naturalness of the external world as opposed to the fictional character, Katherine, in the car, leads us to pay attention to Ingrid Bergman's performance. There is an everyday casualness and ordinariness in the way the subjects of these documentary-like images move. Moreover, the camera seems carefree, as if it started rolling by chance, without any pre-planning of location, framing or lighting. The interior shots, on the contrary, hardly vary: the camera is fixed on the medium close-ups of Katherine and, during these shots, her movements and expressions are limited. Katherine is an observer of life outside; she neither belongs there nor understands it. At times, the juxtaposition of these shots makes us forget the distinction between character and actor, Katherine and Ingrid Bergman. Indeed, Tag Gallagher reports that Rossellini 'didn't know what the story or characters would be until they

“happened” (1998: 413) and that ‘there is [...] no “acting.” The person inside the actor is still revealing himself by accident and inadvertence’ (407). In this sense, the filming of the streets is not very different than filming the stars as they are performing. Laura Mulvey similarly observes that ‘the two stars’ performances [...] slide between their own screen *personae*’ (2000: 100). She describes this as ‘a decentralising of the traditional unity of star and story’ (100) and points to the interference of non-fiction with fiction.

Katherine is detached both emotionally and physically from the external world in these scenes, where the contrast between fiction and non-fiction parallels her questioning of her suspended relationship. This questioning gradually turns into a spiritual investigation of the inexplicabilities of life and death. Furthermore, the opposition between the performed action and the natural action, between the life of Katherine in London and of the people of Naples, between the carefully composed image of her in the car and the freely shot images of the outside, points at the form of the scenes, raising questions about performance and filmmaking that extend beyond the fictional world. V. F. Perkins defines the fictional world in *Citizen Kane* as being our world (it ‘shares our economy, our technologies, our architecture [...] our history’ [2005: 19]), yet distinct from it as Kane is famous throughout that world, and we have never heard of him (20). There is nothing unusual for Katherine in this fictional world that she inhabits; it is the shift in the ways in which this fictional world is presented that is unusual for us. Similarly, there is continuity and coherency in that fictional world where nobody knows that Katherine is in fact Ingrid Bergman or that the people of Naples are characters in this film. We know and we notice things not only because we are outside the fictional world but also because of the shifting narration; this is what makes the film seem discontinuous.



In the car scenes, Katherine looks out of the window and we assume that the subsequent shots will reveal what she is looking at (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). The images are not entirely irrelevant; regardless of the temporal and spatial shift in relation to the preceding ones, they show the streets of Naples, through which Katherine is driving.



**Figure 4.1** Katherine in car; **Figure 4.2** A funeral in Naples

Therefore, they correspond to Katherine's look, perhaps not in form, but in content. The controlled artificiality of a conventional counter-shot is eliminated, though, replaced with a purer, more pristine and non-judgemental gaze. We look at Katherine; Katherine looks at the people of Naples; the people of Naples look at each other, to Katherine and to us (theirs seems to be the less limited of the three looks); and we look back.<sup>4</sup> Our look is continuous, but as it is reciprocated, we realise a rupture. There is no attempt to match the shots of the outer world precisely with what Katherine sees; these shots are independent and out of place. Her life is remote from

these images; and similarly, these images are somehow remote from the fictional world. Paradoxically, they are what Katherine sees; and in this sense, they belong to the narrative of this film. Through the use of such a style, the story of the film grows from being about a couple's crisis into an inquiry into the permanence of life. The documentary-like shots change what we are looking at and how we are looking at it. There is discontinuity in that it disrupts the way the story is narrated; it disorients and redirects our attention and thinking. However, these disruptions expand the story, carry it forward and add significance to it.

If Rossellini maintains a rigid tension between fiction and non-fiction, then Jean-Luc Godard extends it at the expense of exposing all elements of filmmaking. The tension no longer exists but it turns into a reconciliation or a dialogue between the two poles. In *Une femme est une femme* (1961), for instance, there is a similar confrontational interplay of fiction and non-fiction, but it is more obvious.<sup>5</sup> These two types of narration are no longer separate and the frequency of the shifts between them eliminates the possibility of distinguishing the two.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the constant exploration of the differences and similarities between fiction and non-fiction by the filmmaker makes it at times impossible to pinpoint what belongs to the fictional world, and what to performance or improvisation. This use seems discontinuous because we cannot classify it into any conventional genre; however, such a fluctuation in style is in fact part of the film's narrative.

The difference between fiction and non-fiction in *Une femme est une femme* is arbitrary and Godard uses almost all filmic elements to diminish this difference. Performances and their presentations are probably the most obvious components that prevent the formation of concrete fictional characters. Regularly, all actors step out of their filmic personas without difficulty to be themselves. Explaining Godard's

filming of performances, André Labarthe writes that Godard ‘is scarcely concerned with whether or not [someone] went out, or at what hour she left. What interests him is to see her leave’ (1970: 154). This is a direction towards disclosing ‘the truth of the characters’ (156); even ‘the words are not there to express something, but rather to express the characters’ (155). Characters always bear the actors who play them out. Therefore, arguably, Godard documents the performance of the actors, which inevitably contains both fiction and non-fiction.<sup>7</sup>

Such an interplay between the two modes is especially visible in Anna Karina’s performance; Edgardo Cozarinsky argues that ‘Godard has removed all distinction between Angela and the actress playing the role [...] it is Godard’s invariable basic rule to [...] make the spectator aware all the time that what he sees are actors illustrating an action for his benefit’ (1969: 30). The narrative continuity in *Une femme* is maintained more by documenting the way Karina is and the way she performs than the loosely structured story of Angela wanting to get pregnant.<sup>8</sup> Karina contributes to this documentation with her acting: sudden direct addresses or bows to camera are common throughout the film. A famous moment is when the camera follows her in the living room, as she unsuccessfully tries to look for a corner to get away from it or to find a spot that the camera cannot capture. Godard relies both on editing and camera to be able to maintain the constant shift between fiction and non-fiction. Long takes permit naturalness and documentary-like images. The long walk that Angela and Albert (Jean Paul Belmondo) take on the street, for instance, includes random passers-by and an irrelevant conversation between them about the uses of adjectives in French.<sup>9</sup> Godard’s long takes allow the actors to make mistakes and through editing, he emphasises such instances. In one of the famous scenes in the film, we see Angela/Karina crying on the screen. As Angela, she is angry at the way

Émile (Jean-Claude Brialy) treats her in the story and as Karina, she is frustrated with her momentary incapability to communicate in French. Referring to this scene

Labarthe writes,

Godard retains only those shots in which her acting is at its weakest. A remarkable intuition, because these scenes are by nature the most revealing. Defects in the armour call forth his interest more than the protective playacting itself; so much so that he even prefers a poor shot to a good one – even juxtaposing one with the other. (1970: 155)

In this sense, the shift between fiction and non-fiction in the performances is reinforced by the unusual mixing of montage and long takes.

Other stylistic elements, such as sound, are used similarly in the film. Just as we think a sound belongs to a scene, an abrupt cut may change its status from diegetic to non-diegetic. In the opening scene, for example, it is difficult to grasp whether the music is playing in the café or not; it continues onto the next shots and is often interrupted either with silence or the sound of the street, making the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction blurry. Sound almost becomes an independent element to follow, one which does not always adhere to the moods and conditions of a scene. Colour functions in the same way. The obvious changes of filters in the music hall scene, for instance, give red and blue more than a symbolic meaning. As Paul Sharits argues, colour ‘becomes, in itself, a formative theme’ (1966: 26); ‘within the realm of the commercial film, Godard has accomplished the unique task of casting colours effectively in major dramatic roles’ (29).

The interaction of fiction and non-fiction is an artistic investigation by Godard; he argued ‘there was never an independent reality which film captured but rather a filmic articulation of reality in which both montage and *mise en scène* has a part to play’ (Quoted in Eaton and MacCabe 1980: 112-113). Eaton and MacCabe write that ‘Godard’s cinema [...] combines techniques of direct cinema with a commitment to both montage and *mise en scène*. He thus combines three approaches

which were, and to a certain extent are, widely held to be incompatible' (112). This characteristic makes the stories of his films incomplete, performances incoherent, and the images fluctuating between real and illusory. And it inevitably makes the films unclassifiable, as they shift between the genres. Labarthe writes '[*Une femme est une femme* is] based in tonal ruptures [...] one never knows whether it is a comedy or a tragedy' (1970: 154). According to him, the film 'is a succession of independently valuable and autonomous shots' (154); 'any given shot is a negation of preceding shots, it cancels them out, they do not bear fruit' (155). Such a use has a disrupting effect if we think of the film as a fictional film; however, in terms of documenting the making of a film it functions as an element of continuity.

A shift in the way reality is represented in films disrupts our engagement with the films' narratives. However, in *Viaggio in Italia* and *Une femme est une femme* this discontinuity does not only remain as a break; it has thematic and stylistic functions.

### **Genre-hopping: *Tirez sur la pianiste* and *Johnny Guitar***

*Une femme est une femme*'s self-reflexive structure takes the stylistic elements to such an extreme that they are no longer a means of storytelling but a part of the film's content. Comparably, the shifts in narration in *Tirez sur le pianiste* (François Truffaut, 1960) are so frequent that the film seems to be jumping between different genre conventions. It stretches the possibility of genre-hopping to the level of an investigation and a parody of genres.<sup>10</sup> Just as we think we are watching a comedy, the film suddenly turns into a tragedy; Truffaut 'destroy[s] our normal expectations and assumptions about pattern and order and neat categorization of experience' (Petrie 1972: 151) and 'the incongruous rhythms and bizarre juxtapositions force a

continual process of re-adjustment on the viewer' (153). Because the conventions of each genre are in this continual process of intermingling, we re-establish our engagement with the narrative to understand it. Genre-hopping in *Tirez sur le pianiste* is made possible largely with the film's seemingly free-flowing structure evident from the opening scene. A man who seems to be running away from something ends up in a café, seeking help from the pianist, Charlie Kohler (Charles Aznavour), whom we find out is his brother. Just as Chico (Albert Rémy) has come across Charlie after many years, we have run into the film's protagonist. Chico is in trouble, which will soon start to change Charlie's life; however, other than accidentally passing this trouble onto Charlie, Chico will not reappear until the end of the film. *Tirez sur le pianiste* is actually Charlie Kohler's film and, akin to the chain of incidents in this first scene, even the greatest events in his life are initiated as a consequence of others' actions. Moreover, we often learn about Charlie through other characters or his voice-over, which usually contradicts what he chooses to do.<sup>11</sup>

Even though it switches between different modes of narration to tell its story, the film has a linear and conventional storyline with a cause and effect chain. The narrative proceeds in a chronological fashion except for the flashback narrated by Charlie's girlfriend, Lena (Marie Dubois), halfway through the film, which reveals Charlie's former identity as the great pianist, Edouard Saroyan. There are no vital gaps or deliberate interventions that break the story apart. As in the opening scene described above, Truffaut uses stylistic traits within shots or scenes that are quite common in films by the New Wave filmmakers, ranging from choices such as jump-cuts, which have minor effects on the continuity of the story, to those which are more apparent and demand attention. For instance, instead of staying with the event relative to the story, the camera follows an unknown character in the scene where

Edouard visits his producer for the first time. Reluctant to ring the bell, Edouard only goes into the office because a violinist opens the door to go out. As he enters the office and goes out of the frame, the camera stays with this woman walking through the corridor and we hear the sound of a piano playing. Then there is a cut to a middle close-up of this woman framed against the building in the background; she walks into the building's yard and leaves through the gate (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). At the same



**Figure 4.3** Edouard and the anonymous violinist at the entrance of the producer's office;  
**Figure 4.4** The anonymous violinist in the yard.

time, Charlie is probably offered a contract that will make him very famous; this is a crucial incident that will shape the things to come in the story. Since this incident is told from the viewpoint of Lena who is only telling what she knows but was not present during the discussion with Edouard, the structure of this scene makes sense. These unconventional stylistic choices slightly affect the continuity in *Tirez sur le pianiste*, but we are steadily re-oriented into the narrative.

The discontinuity in *Tirez sur le pianiste* is related to the constant shift in the combination of elements of different genres. As Graham Petrie precisely summarises,

[the film's] unsettling and disorienting quality [...] comes less from unusual or experimental camera techniques than from bizarre and unexpected juxtapositions of mood, setting, and action, from constant and sudden alterations between farce and tragedy, and from the nature and behavior of the characters involved. (1972: 148)

The film's subject matter is Edouard Saroyan/Charlie Kohler's quite complicated and tragic life: his wife commits suicide after having confessed that she had sex with the music producer in order to give him his big chance; he quits his career, changes his name and abandons his family; as he is starting to feel something for Lena the waitress who works at the same bar, he gets mixed up with his brothers' business with the gangsters; out of self-defence, he kills the bar owner, who is also in love with Lena, but he cannot prevent Lena from being murdered by the gangsters at the end. However, in contrast with this serious content, the film's form is deliberately playful. Indeed, there is no rule that content and form should be parallel; murder, violence and betrayal are often themes in comedies, and Hitchcock, for instance, is famous for using humour in his thrillers. However, *Tirez sur le pianiste* is not simply a comedy; in fact, it does not contain the characteristics of only one genre.

The film's carefree attitude to its serious subject matter is reflected through the loosely established conventions. The tone of the narration regularly shifts, which causes us to adopt a different viewpoint. For instance, the gangsters are portrayed as two ridiculous caricatures: what distinguishes them, as Chico describes, is that 'one wears a hat and the other one a cap'. They seem like amateurs when they are trying to kidnap Charlie and Lena who easily run away when their car is stopped by the police. The gangsters' characters are revealed more when they are with their third hostage Fido (Richard Kanayan), Charlie's younger brother. They discuss their interest in foreign consumer goods such as 'an American snorkel pen', 'a London suit',



‘Egyptian leather shoes’ and ‘a Japanese scarf made of thin metal’. Because of this humorous portrayal, we never expect these characters to kill Lena in the end. Similarly, elements of drama, adventure and comedy are usually found together in a single scene: Charlie and Lena come to the bar to tell the owners that they are together and they decided to quit. Lena makes a very intimate comment about Charlie: ‘He’s alone even when he’s not alone’. Referring to Charlie’s generally indifferent and reserved character, perhaps she wants to express her unrequited love; she is the only one in the frame; her head is slightly bent down; she is solemn and thoughtful. This brief instant is followed by a jump cut to a shot of the bar with all the characters around. Lena starts arguing with the bar owner while the barmaid is trying to interfere. Charlie, as he usually does in the film, strays away from them and tries to decide what to do while we hear his voice-over. The argument remains in the background as an exaggerated and funny complement while Charlie walks to the piano and starts playing it. The lightness of this moment is remarkably reversed as Charlie gets into a fight with the bar owner and has to stab him in order to save himself.

All these abrupt shifts cause a change in viewpoint and draw attention to the film’s structure, which is something that needs to be followed as much as its story. There is discontinuity only in terms of the audience’s access to the film’s narrative; with every shift the form of that access transforms, which re-establishes how one attends to the narrative. The genre-hopping creates this discontinuity, but at the same time it produces alternative meanings within and beyond the narrative.<sup>12</sup> As Pearson and Rhode write, ‘Since we are not interested in content but in the mind handling it, the disruptions and disconnections of narrative no longer disturb us’ (1961: 166) and ‘they cohere beautifully’ (161).<sup>13</sup> Not only does the film contain fragments of

references to some of the most famous examples of adventure, drama, romance and film noir, it also points at how cinema allows the filmmaker to blend them freely and easily. Cinephilia and self-reflexivity have been identified by many writers as two significant characteristics of the New Wave and this is evident in *Tirez sur le pianiste*, which is also about the joy of making and watching cinema.

This style of genre-hopping in *Tirez sur le pianiste* can be compared with that of *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954); Truffaut claims Ray's film had 'the strongest influence' (1972: 125) on him when making his own. In a review of *Johnny Guitar* in 1955, he wrote that it is 'not really a Western, nor is it an "intellectual Western". It is a Western that is dream-like, magical, unreal to a degree, delirious' (1985: 107). Although much subtler in its use of style than *Tirez*, the sense of unreality and deliriousness in *Johnny Guitar*, projected through the bold use of breaking the established tone, is relevant to the narrative. Brian Fairlamb writes that the influence of *Johnny Guitar* on this film 'attracted little critical attention, presumably because of the ostensible contrasts of genre and style' (1996: 50); however, there are similarities as much as contrasts between the two films. 'The single strongest and common element to emerge from study of these films', contrary to Fairlamb's argument, is not 'the presentation and examination of a troubled, hurt masculinity' (50); the two films have common characteristics in terms of style, story and theme. If *Johnny Guitar* is an experiment in shifting tones and 'it simultaneously celebrates and parodies the Western genre' (Fairlamb 1996: 54), *Tirez* is an experiment of shifting between the conventions of different genres. The fictional worlds of these two films have different characteristics. In *Tirez sur le pianiste* we get a sense of the autonomy of the story, the characters and the camera, all of which make that fictional world appear to be reaching beyond the screen. This does not happen in *Johnny Guitar*, a difference

that may be attributable to the periods in which they were made, the filmmakers' styles and the subject matters. The style and narrative of *Tirez sur le pianiste* acknowledge the film's means of storytelling at the risk of disturbing the story. The characters seem to know that they are a part of a film and have freedom to play with the given structure; the voice-over sometimes leads us away from the main event; a cut may abruptly end a scene without resolving it. This is an open world that seems to be in the making; it is in the process of becoming with each viewing, whereas in *Johnny Guitar*, stricter rules protect the established limits of the fictional world and the constructed reality is not jeopardised. According to V. F. Perkins, '*Johnny Guitar*'s play with the genre involves [an] intricate and challenging pattern in which established expectations are in some respects maintained, in some varied or reversed and in some exposed through over-fulfillment' (1996: 226). Contrary to the transient genre conventions in *Tirez*, *Johnny Guitar* remains a Western throughout, although an unusual one.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, *Johnny Guitar* is an extremely stylised film: colour, framings, performances and settings are carefully chosen to depict or support the mood of a scene or characters. However, none of these elements develop independently in the story; nor do they stand out separately and disengage from the continuity of the narrative. The style in this film supports the story. The use of colour, for instance, is very obvious, usually reflecting the characters' identities or situations; similarly, the locations are very consciously chosen or built as symbols within a single shot or throughout the film. An example of both uses is the scene in which Vienna (Joan Crawford) is playing the piano on the stage in her recently emptied bar while Emma (Mercedes McCambridge) and the rest of the townspeople question her about the whereabouts of the Dancing Kid's (Scott Brady's) gang and accuse her of

collaborating with them in the bank robbery. Vienna is in a white dress and she is framed alone against the red wall of the room; she is innocent and unprotected yet simultaneously self-confident and strong (Figure 4.5). Opposed to this image is the long shot of Emma and the others in black, standing, waiting impatiently in the middle of the room (Figure 4.6). Alternating shots visually mark the tension between them. The two sides never mix; Vienna is friends with the outlaws and she is against violence and crime, whereas Emma, the sheriff and the other lawful townspeople are eager to condemn and judge her in the name of justice. In general, this sharp distinction between the two opposing sides is made visually prominent: they physically occupy different spaces, are often framed separately and wear contrasting colours. Even though Emma and the others enter Vienna's, they always stay intact as a group and never occupy more than the limited space that Vienna delicately controls.



**Figure 4.5** Vienna in white



**Figure 4.6** Townspeople in black

Generally, the use of locations, framings, colour and light are constant and consistent with the fundamental elements of the story and helps to define fixed and distinct attributes of characters and their relationships. However, at times, unconventional stylistic choices make these attributes transform, as the film briefly and abruptly borrows sets of conventions from different genres. This borrowing only stretches the limits of the film's genre and is always done effectively, economically and in agreement with the narrative. There is a flow in tone and this flow is

incorporated into the reality of the filmic world. Arguably, that flow would be unlikely to take place in real situations and it would seem unrealistic in many films, but it is acceptable and ordinary in *Johnny Guitar*'s world. At the start of the film, there is one scene that exemplifies the fluidity of tones and genre conventions. Emma and the townspeople bring the dead body of Emma's brother to Vienna, who comes out of her room and looks down at them from the top of the stairs. They argue because Emma holds the Dancing Kid responsible for her brother's death and accuses Vienna of protecting the gang. This positioning is a precursor to the similar setting in the scene described above and it specifies the nature of the relationship between them. Only when the argument is over does Vienna come down to ground level. Moments later, the Dancing Kid and the gang enter the bar. Just before another argument breaks out, Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden) enters the scene with a blue coffee cup in his hand and makes a joke. As a newcomer, he does not fit into the pre-established polarity of the two groups and appears as a threat to both the sheriff and the Kid. The confrontation between the Kid and Johnny is a strangely funny encounter with reference to their nicknames: Johnny asks the Kid if he can dance, and he, in return challenges Johnny to play music. As Johnny starts to play his guitar, the Kid grabs Emma and they dance to the rhythmic tune. The humorous and entertaining moments in this scene are severely contradicted with the tone of the previous conversation between the two women in the presence of the dead body. These contradictions, born from the abrupt alternating tones, add a kind of ambiguity to the characters: for instance, Emma's hatred of Vienna might have grown from both envy and desire.

The film is constructed using the conventions of Western, but it also uses moods and attitudes that come from melodrama, crime and comedy, at the risk of undermining the central themes of justice, judgement and conformity.<sup>15</sup> Moreover,

this shift is repeated persistently; for instance, in the previously described scene, the sheriff unexpectedly breaks a whisky bottle on the wall to end the dancing and joking and threatens to close down the bar; and shortly afterwards, when Emma and the townspeople leave, Johnny lightens up the mood and closes the scene with a short odd sound he plays on his guitar. These constant shifts create a discontinuity in tone, but they do not disengage us from the narrative nor make the main story implausible. Leo Charney approaches the film by looking at the interplay between cinematic excess and containment: ‘formal tension of containment and excess manifests itself [...] in the tense balance of its male/female relations’ (1990: 30). He continues to argue that anything excessive is contained, both in the formal structure and the narrative: the film does not radicalize the Western genre to become something else and the allegorical connotations of feminism or lesbianism, for instance, are made to be confined to the norms. Jennifer Peterson argues further in a similar manner and suggests that ‘gender mobility, then, is the key to understanding *Johnny Guitar*. The film engages in a critique of identity through its use of the masquerade to powerfully illuminate the workings of the gendered power imbalance’ (1996: 16). According to her, gender fluidity is given to Vienna and Johnny, while Emma is always stuck in her stable identity; while the film succeeds in criticising the McCarthy era, it puts a woman at the centre of the crisis, responsible for the evil. All these subtexts emerge from the excess or the unconventional flow of tones that allow for these multiple interpretations. Discontinuity in tone in *Johnny Guitar*, therefore, creates diversity as well as ambiguity, but does not disrupt the continuity of the narrative.

*Tirez sur le pianiste* freely skips from one set of genre conventions to the other or intermingles them while *Johnny Guitar* has a more subtle way of tending towards a genre other than its own. The two films are entirely different in terms of

periods, contexts, filmmakers and styles, however, they exhibit two distinct forms of genre-hopping. More radical in style, *Tirez* easily plays with the boundaries of its filmic world, in which we are frequently reminded that it is a fiction. *Johnny Guitar* keeps its plot and characters less malleable even though at times there are changes in mood and tone. Changing genre conventions directly affects the way we make meaning of a narrative because the familiarity with these conventions quickly directs us to take a standpoint from which to assess it. If a film starts out as a comedy, for instance, most of the incidents that take place are a source of fun or irony no matter how tragic they may be in terms of content. Charlie's sad story in *Tirez*, as mentioned above, is not as emotionally intense as it would be if it were told within the conventions of drama. Films that hop across genres are not uncommon especially in non-classical, alternative cinemas. These are not hybrid genre films in which we can easily pinpoint their generic elements, the reality of the filmic world is more or less kept constant and we expect the influence of a combination of genres.<sup>16</sup> Genre-hopping films pass from one genre to the other with minimal conspicuousness, that is, the signs of this transition are not readily available for the viewers. These films change their modes of narration suddenly and without warning, but the result is not a total abandonment of what the films have already established. This creates a zone of unreliability and surprise for the viewers who may find it difficult to adjust to the new narrational modes in terms of judging and understanding the narratives because their expectations have shifted.

So far the chapter has focused on older examples, but genre-hopping can also be found among contemporary films. *Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch, 2001), *Takeshis* (Takeshi Kitano, 2005) and *Yadon Ilaheyya* (Elia Suleiman, 2002) are some of the recent examples from different contexts and filmmakers. The last example, *Yadon*

*Ilaheyya* is an appropriate case to explain how startling the effect of genre-hopping can be.<sup>17</sup> Although the film is generally tagged as a drama, it attains different genre conventions throughout. It starts out as a film that progresses slowly with scenes that seemingly document the everyday life of several characters from a village at the Israeli border in Palestine. The dialogue is minimal, images are realistic and the director's interference with the action seems non-existent. About half an hour into the film, we realise that the protagonist is a man (Elia Suleiman, the director himself) looking for ways to meet his lover who lives on the other side of the border. As the film advances, it visits other genres such as comedy because of the ways in which the man's efforts to cross the border are portrayed. The interactions with the Israeli security forces throughout the film are told in a parody rather than dramatic sequences. This lighter tone, emphasised at times with Palestinian pop music, leads to other surprises in narrational mode. The pace gets much faster towards the end when we see the film evolve into a fantasy. There is especially one sequence in which with the use of computer generated images the protagonist's girlfriend is turned into a Ninja-like warrior and she exterminates all the Israeli police forces in a manner similar to those found in video games. This sequence could as well be from another film when compared to the documentary-like opening scenes. Although the film's switches from one genre to the other are surprising, it manages to utilise diverse generic elements within its entirety. The subject matter that the film explores is delicate, serious and thought-provoking; the conflict between Palestine and Israel has not been resolved for almost a century now, resulting in the death of thousands. The documentary-like opening scenes in the film convey the feeling of in-betweenness; seemingly time runs slower in this region, everyday routines are unusual, but people do not appear to feel insecure or anxious. The realistic style in these scenes seem to



connote the idea of waiting and the fact that anything can happen at any moment. Meanwhile, by using comedy and fantasy in the rest of the film, Elia Suleiman critically points at the absurdity of some of the issues caused by the conflict while he uses filmic possibilities to illustrate his imaginary reactions and solutions.

As is the case with the examples in the previous chapters, discontinuities in genre-hopping films upset the audience's expectations. Shifts in narration are not signposted, which makes the audience disengage from the narrative and re-form its relationship with it. Such a practice changes the way we make sense of a film because it leads us to look at the narratives from alternative viewpoints and question our immediate perception of them. The following sections are going to explore more varieties of these types of discontinuities that are caused by unsettling narrations.

### **Upsetting Expectations: *Psycho* and *Eraserhead***

Fundamentally all films that we call discontinuous as well as the ones that cause disruptions in narration are playing with audience's expectations. The definition of a conventional story has consistency, coherence and continuity in all elements of its narration. Therefore, a change in one of them forces us to re-define what we are engaged with. What we usually describe as discontinuity is this different use, but it may not always have a negative effect and can actually support and carry the film's story further. *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), for instance, abruptly switches its focus from one subject to another halfway through the storyline. One of the most well-known scenes in the history of cinema is the shower scene in the film. This scene is not only extremely fragmented within itself, it also acts as a splitting instrument within the film's narrative. It starts out with a slow rhythm; however, from the beginning, the action is unconventionally and disturbingly chopped as if to

suggest the butchering that is about to take place. The series of shots between the time Marion (Janet Leigh) gets into the shower and the moment we see the shadow of a figure behind the curtain establish and introduce the action. We see a medium close-up of Marion from the front; there is a cut to a close-up of the shower from right below, followed by the previous shot. Next, there is a cut to another medium close-up of Marion's profile against the wall. The following shot, a slightly closer medium close-up, shows her turning under the water and then there is a cut to the close-up of the shower from the side. The abrupt shift in the position of the camera in the next shot presents us with a medium close-up of Marion's profile again yet this time placing her against the shower curtain from the opposite direction. The rest of the scene follows in a similar manner; however, the pace of cutting and the range of camera angles increase, which enhances the level of intensity. The scene is dominated by close-ups of Marion's face and body; she is visually and literally sliced.

The narrative of *Psycho*, up to this point, develops as a story of theft and Marion is the protagonist. When Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) murders Marion, he terminates the previous story and steals the role of the main character. The shower scene becomes a junction where the two stories clash. Robin Wood writes in relation to the shower scene,

Never [...] has identification been broken off so brutally. At the same time, so engrossed are we in Marion, that we can scarcely believe it is happening; when it is over, and she is dead, we are left shocked, with nothing to cling to, the apparent center of the film entirely dissolved.

Needing a new center, we attach ourselves to Norman Bates, the only character (at this point) available. We have been carefully prepared for this shift of sympathies. (1989: 146)

For Peter Wollen, 'the murder [...] makes a break, a rupture' and produces 'two separate stories by the removal of the protagonist' (1982: 34). Many writers refer to this unusual elimination of the central character<sup>18</sup> because such a use was, at the time, 'virtually unthinkable in the construction of mainstream narratives' (Knight and

McKnight 1999: 118). As Raymond Durgnat writes, ‘the death of Janet Leigh [...] defies all standard dramatic protocol since Aristotle. It proclaims a state of chaos, especially rare in American entertainment then’ (2002: 111). The structure of the two narratives, according to Raymond Bellour produces an ‘end [that] in no way replies to the beginning’ (2000: 238), which is contradictory to ‘the principle of classical film’ that requires ‘between one and the other something be set in order’ (238).<sup>19</sup> The shower scene splits *Psycho*’s narrative into two, producing two different protagonists, themes, stories and moods and it also ‘brings formal questions about the structure of narrative into the very surface of its plot’ (Mulvey 2006: 86-87). Discontinuity and self-reflexivity are characteristics of modernist works and in fact many critics compare *Psycho* with modernist examples from film and literature: Raymond Durgnat argues that [it] ‘approximates the Marxist-modernist shape of Antonioni’s *L’Avventura*’ (2002: 222); George Toles compares it to works of Edgar Allan Poe and George Bataille (1999: 159); Robin Wood places it among modernist literary works like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1989: 150).

In this sense, the shower scene is similar to the crack halfway through one of the very well known examples of modernist cinema that was discussed in the previous chapter, *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966), except the narrative of *Psycho* never dismantles; it develops and ends in a linear fashion. Mulvey argues that although the latter’s narrative is ‘located firmly within traditional narrative, it nevertheless attains a modern self-reflexivity’ (2006: 85). The interruptions in the two films are quite similar; they differ only because their relationship with the narratives differs. The two sections in *Psycho* are causally united and the shower scene is integrated into this unity, whereas the crack in *Persona* destroys any further possibility of forming a story. Perhaps the distinction between these two films is similar to that between

*Johnny Guitar* and *Tirez sur le pianiste*; after the split, *Persona* conspicuously acknowledges the future presence of an audience without providing them complete access to its narrative whereas *Psycho* envisages a bond with audiences in a discreet manner though offering hints to them.<sup>20</sup> *Johnny Guitar* and *Psycho* use discontinuities as something to supplement the continuity of the narrative: they add to the richness and detail of the world and its characters in the former, and they create mystery in the latter. In *Tirez sur le pianiste* and *Persona*, discontinuities disrupt us even though they add meaning to the stories. The genre-hopping and the split in these two films exceed being merely stylistic elements; they are a part of what these films are about. Filmic expectations are manipulated and upset but this is the pattern in which the films construct their narratives. Discontinuity then, is generally explained in terms of the audience's relationship with the narratives. In other words, information we receive from narratives as well as the criticism and judgement we impose on them depend on modes of narration. When these modes are broken, so is our access shattered. Discontinuities exist at those times when narratives surprise us, the narrational modes shift unexpectedly and the boundaries of the fictional world are trespassed or transform. However, these discontinuities do not solely cause discomfort for the audiences; they undertake different functions.

David Lynch's filmmaking style has perhaps become synonymous with playing with cinematic conventions both on the visual and narrative level. His films are frequently described as discontinuous, fragmented or indecipherable. Using dream sequences is arguably the most apparent mark of his filmmaking. *Eraserhead* (1977), *Elephant Man* (1980) and *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) all open with similar indecipherable dream-like sequences that are mainly structured with superimpositions. They look like they are composed of figures or symbols from

within the film, which we hope will be explained later on, but usually remain in the void. The deformed man in *Eraserhead* may be Henry's (Jack Nance's) baby as a grown-up man; the crying woman in *Elephant Man* may be Frederic Treves's (Anthony Hopkins's) mother; the old couple in *Mulholland* are perhaps Betty's (Naomi Watts's) grandparents from Canada.<sup>21</sup> The films allude to such possibilities yet they never provide firm answers. *Inland Empire* (2006) takes this form even further, so that the entire film becomes a dream sequence. This uncertainty makes us question what these scenes are about and what the underlying meanings are. By leaving gaps in the narrative, Lynch refrains from providing answers to the questions he poses.

In *Eraserhead*, Henry finds himself on a stage which seems to exist in the radiator in his room. There he meets a strange woman, singing and squashing with her feet the embryo- or sperm-like creatures falling down from above. Despite its extreme disconnectedness, the bizarreness of this dream world is relevant to the rest of the film's fictional world. For instance, Henry's room is filled with strange objects: there is a pile of hay on the floor right in front of the radiator; on his bedside table, a seemingly dead plant stands without a pot. The characters' behaviour is similarly absurd: Mary's (Charlotte Stewart's) sudden seizure in the middle of a conversation or her mother's erratic outbreak at the dinner as a reaction to the bleeding chicken on Henry's plate is regarded as slightly disturbing, if not normal, in the filmic world. The questions that the film provokes in relation to our world are, therefore, rendered irrelevant. The film works with metaphors and symbols and this makes it less decipherable, nevertheless coherent or continuous. In fact, *Eraserhead* has a linear narrative into which dream sequences are incorporated. Furthermore, the themes that it explores, such as repressed sexuality, premarital sex or the alienating

urban life, were common in many contemporary Hollywood films. Todd McGowan argues that ‘Lynch is very much a Hollywood filmmaker, [...] committed to delivering fantasies to his audiences, even if these fantasies do themselves deviate from the Hollywood norm’ (2007: 27). Referring to the ending, he further writes, ‘The protagonist realizes her/his fantasy and achieves a moment of complete satisfaction. This would seem to locate *Eraserhead*, despite its bizarre structure, within the orbit of traditional Hollywood film’ (46).

*Eraserhead*’s story is not atypical; only some elements have been replaced by their unconventional versions including characters’ attitudes, locations and objects. Moreover, the film treats the story in an unexpected way; the shifts between dream, fantasy and reality turn the drama into horror. The difference between what we expect and believe and what actually happens in the filmic world intermittently disengages us from the continuity of the story. Martha Nochimson draws attention to how the film challenges us to deal with the unexpected issues in the narrative. Referring to the baby, she writes, ‘The narrative depends on the conflict between the audience’s perception of the barely formed matter [...] and the characters’ beliefs that they are dealing with a baby’ (1997: 152). Similarly, David Lynch employs this technique in the film’s form by making unconventional stylistic choices. For instance, we rarely see the reverse shot of what Henry’s anxious eyes are observing and the lighting is designed to conceal the unknown further; Todd McGowan calls this ‘the absence of expected form’ or ‘a mise-en-scène that further stresses absence rather than presence’ (2007: 33). Discontinuity, therefore, only exists in *Eraserhead* in terms of the audience’s access to the story. As the film presents more open-ended moments in the fluctuation between non-linear dream and linear reality, it intensifies the desire to re-construct and understand. As McGowan argues, Henry is the desiring

subject and the object of his desire is not given to him in the film until the end. What Henry desires and what we desire is coherence:

Watching the film, one must endure the lack of light, the barrenness of the image, and the long stretches of time in which nothing happens. This alienation pushes the spectator, as it does Henry, into the position of the desiring subject: like Henry, one experiences oneself in the middle of a world that doesn't make sense, and one desires to access its mysteries. (2007: 35)

The criteria on which interpretations of *Eraserhead* are based should not be confined primarily to the story as the film is not concerned with completing a story; such an approach can limit the kinds of relevant and applicable questions one can formulate. Discontinuity in *Eraserhead* certainly has a disruptive and confusing effect, but it has other functions, such as the parallelism between Henry's desire and the viewers' desire for meaning.

The focus of this chapter so far has been films that unexpectedly play with audience's expectations. However, there are certain cases in which interferences in narration are regarded as a typical condition. The next section is going to discuss how discontinuity functions in these cases.

### **When Disruptions Are Normal: *Top Hat***

As discussed in the examples above, discontinuity in cinema is a product of a desire to understand and make meaning; thus it is always defined in relation to the story told. As cinema is based on photography and projected in time, it is no surprise that this desire is transformed into an expectation of a realistic, linear narrative. Any film that disrupts the reality of the fictional world, the forward moving narrative or the established mode of narration is usually regarded as discontinuous. However, this condition changes if the disruption is regulated as a genre convention and becomes predictable and familiar. The most straightforward example to illustrate this is the musical. The musical is a genre whose stylistic conventions are comparable to the

features of what this thesis calls discontinuity films. Disruptions, halts and omissions in narrative unity can be found in musicals dating back to the period when sound was first introduced. Song, music and performance are the primary elements of a musical; stories are narrated by these three elements and the style is used to support and draw attention to them.<sup>22</sup> Musicals are narrative films that are oriented towards both story and spectacle; gaps or pauses in the story and a conspicuous choice of stylistic elements are typical.<sup>23</sup> Visual and aural extravaganza are stylistic conventions of this genre and abrupt switches to songs are a narrational practice that viewers anticipate. Costumes, colours, lighting, set design and performances may seem exaggerated, unnecessary or unfitting at times, but not if they serve the musical numbers. As Jane Feuer writes,

Since the musical borrows its proscenium performances from live entertainment, the shift to direct address does not strike us as odd; it seems very natural. Yet direct address is often cited as one of the chief means of 'distanciation' in modernist theatre and film. (1982: 35)

Feuer explains the functions of these similar uses by borrowing the term 'multiple diegesis' from Peter Wollen and writes that in a Godard film multiple diegesis calls attention to 'the discrepancy between fiction and reality, or fiction and history' whereas in a musical 'heterogeneous levels are created so that they may be homogenized in the end through the union of the romantic couple' (36). The contrasts in a musical are presented solely for the function of creating a resolution in the end whereas modernist films such as Godard's will not necessarily present a conflict of contrasts but their agreement or harmony. Alternatively, modernist films will leave the conflict as it is, without trying to offer a solution. Leo Braudy similarly argues that 'the games with continuous narrative that Busby Berkeley plays' are comparable to the jumpcutting in the New Wave and 'the musical is self-conscious about its stylization, the heightened reality that is its norm' (1976: 141).



*Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich, 1935) is one of the earliest examples of the musical genre and illustrates many of these arguments. Fred Astaire's role in the film coincides with his real life career as he plays the character of Jerry Travers, a famous American stage musical dancer. Travers comes to London to take part in a show and during his visit, he falls in love with Dale Tremont (Ginger Rogers) who is staying at the same hotel with him. A series of misunderstandings make them both end up separately in Venice where everything resolves in the end. Astaire's role as Travers in *Top Hat* incorporates the dancing and singing character into the reality of the story, as Travers, like Astaire, is a star. Indeed, in this genre, the filmic reality includes the rather unreal realm of choreography, music and performance during the songs. Most musicals are famous for their performers and especially during the musical numbers, it is impossible to distinguish between the actor and the character. This quality resembles the fluctuation between fiction and non-fiction existent in *Viaggio in Italia* and *Une femme est un femme*. In a similar fashion, in *Top Hat*, the woman dancing on the screen is simultaneously Ginger Rogers and Dale Tremont.

Born out of this self-reflexive characteristic is the contrast between form and narrative in musicals, which gives them a 'dichotomous manner' (Feuer 1982: 68). However, this manner is restricted and will never push the conditions set by a classical narrative such as resolution and unity in the end. Braudy explains that 'the essence of the musical is the potential of the individual to free himself from inhibition at the same time that he retains a sense of limit and propriety in the very form of the liberating dance' (1976: 140). Musical performances are the trademarks of these films and the narratives are built around and developed with them; however, paradoxically they should not dominate and overwhelm the narrative to jeopardise its continuity. The narratives of musicals are composed of a range of relevant songs that

are used to describe situations, express characters' emotions or celebrate the moment. Songs and performances are a part of the reality of the filmic world; even if a song does not continue narrating the story and may halt it at times, the musical narrative does not stop. Rick Altman describes this structure as

The sequence of scenes is determined not out of plot necessity, but in response to a more fundamental need: the spectator must sense the eventual lovers as a couple even when they are not together, even before they have met. Traditional notions of narrative structure assume that chronological presentation implies causal relationship; in the musical, chronological presentation and causal relationships alike are at climactic moments eschewed in favor of simultaneity and similarity. (1987: 28)

Therefore, the continuity of narrative in musicals does not require strict causal, temporal and spatial relationships because more may be delivered in the musical number scenes than the dramatic ones.

The swift shifts to the musical numbers in *Top Hat* pause the story in the background but they also, at times, serve as bridges to drive it forward. As John Mueller argues, 'if [a musical number] were cut from the film, Rogers' love for Astaire [...] would be incomprehensible' (1984: 31). The performances do not create ambiguity; throughout the film we are aware that Astaire and Rogers are the stars of the film and they may start performing at any time. Such shifts in narration do not create discontinuities in the narrative. The same rule applies to the setting. Venice in *Top Hat*, for instance, is quite unrealistic. Edward Gallafent notes that the move from London to Venice 'becomes not a change of world, but [...] an insistence that [this is] a world with no connections to the outside' (2002: 34). The hotel and the city of Venice are, in fact, one and the same and little attempt is made to conceal the soundstage on which they are built; 'the camera movement passes [...] through the floor and ceiling, reminding us [...] that this is a sound stage as well as a hotel' (35). Conventions of the genre ensure that we do not take such a self-reflexive camera movement as an unconventional stylistic element and the musical genre is rarely

classified as a genre with a discontinuous style or narrative, even though it utilises many of the stylistic characteristics that are attributed to discontinuous films.

The narratives of musicals include the dancing, singing, costumes, colours and choreography; the expectation is of extraordinary musical performances and the glamour and harmony of the performers as much as a clearly composed, forward-moving and causally linked narrative. If expectations define some of the ways in which we evaluate discontinuity in films, the self-reflexive and interrupted form in musicals functions as continuity in the narrative. There is regularity and predictability in this form, which does not disrupt.

While the soundstage in *Top Hat* is rarely a matter of discussion, the soundstages in two contemporary films, *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, are considered as odd stylistic choices. Since abstract spaces are regarded as normal in the musical genre, we readily accept the artificiality of Venice. However, the use of soundstages to represent the plantation and the town, which are the only settings in *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, is unsettling for first-time viewers. The next section is going to explore the significance of these soundstages and discuss their discontinuity effect.

### ***Dogville* and *Manderlay*: In which we encounter abstract sets/settings<sup>24</sup>**

Lars von Trier is a director whose distinctive style cannot be only defined by his use of jump-cuts and hand-held cameras; it can rather be found in his inquisitive attitude towards the cinematic medium. Each of von Trier's films has a unique style; all that unites his films is their exploration of the possibilities of storytelling in filmmaking. Von Trier's production company's, Zentropa Real's, manifesto on documentary filmmaking gives ideas about the nature of their exploration of stylistic

elements in cinema and their understanding of filming reality without being caught up with a story:

We are searching for something that is neither fiction nor fact ... that which cannot be contained by a 'story' or grasped by an angle. The material we are searching for is to be found in reality, the same reality where creators of fiction find their inspiration, the same reality which journalists believe they are describing but in fact cannot see because they are blinded by their techniques – techniques which become the goal in and of itself. (Stevenson 2002: 146)

Von Trier believes in destroying techniques to open new ways for filmmaking. He challenges cinema by defying categories:

The most reactionary view of art is expressed by the question 'What is art?', followed by the statement 'This is not art!' Critics have tried to cordon and limit film and literature, which is what I am challenging by creating a fusion between film, theatre and literature. It's important not to submit to such questions as what is or is not filmic because we've arrived at a position where everything is possible. (Von Trier quoted in Björkman 2004a: 25)

Lars von Trier's starting point may be his attempt to merge three different art forms, but my interest lies in the films of his which can be categorised as discontinuity films. Arguably, the new storytelling methods that he pursues add meaning to his provocative narratives as well as maintain continuity.

In the following discussion, I focus on two films from Lars von Trier's USA trilogy, *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005), and the issues they raise relating to the ways in which discontinuity functions in cinema.<sup>25</sup> The unusual approach to sets in these two films directly influences how the other elements of style are used. The desired meaning of the story is made apparent primarily through the use of these bare sets; camera, lighting, acting and other stylistic elements point to their existence to emphasise this meaning. In other words, the nature of the sets has a meaning in the story; it is as much a part of the narrative as it is of the style.

Instead of shooting *Dogville* and *Manderlay* on real locations or on cinematic/realistic film sets, Lars von Trier chose to create an impression of the

settings for both films on a mainly undecorated soundstage.<sup>26</sup> The use of such a large but confined space as their single location is the most obvious constituent of the films. The names of the locations are written on the floor and their borders are defined by chalk lines that allow the actors and the audience to separate inside from outside. When filmed from above, as they often are, these settings resemble a life-size map. Similarly von Trier uses desks, chairs, beds and doors to give a feeling of the time and space in which the story takes place. With their minimal décor, the sets reproduce and diversify sets from classical theatre<sup>27</sup>: they are stages with no backstage, and they are open in all directions including above. The town and the plantation are physically present, but the spaces they occupy are confined to the soundstages; there is a point where they terminate. Hence, the sense of a continuous space in a continuous filmic world created in most films does not apply here. The setting is a town in 1930s America, which is represented only by the bare soundstage itself. In other words, the boundaries between the setting and the set are blurry because there is not much on the soundstage to make it *look like* 1930s America. Taking away the realistic setting in the film, while keeping other stylistic elements more or less normal, challenges the audience in terms of what to expect, what to see and what to look for.

Using soundstages has a direct influence on the films' narratives. Grace's (Nicole Kidman's and Bryce Dallas Howard's) initially coincidental visits to the town and the plantation turn out to be inner journeys that start as pursuits of a belief in goodwill, democracy and freedom and end with cynicism towards mankind. Both stories depict closed communities whose corruptions are revealed via Grace's intrusions. These sets grant us transparency and thus expose the reality of the characters and the incidents. The lack of a realistic setting allows us to see everything

at once and as it is, leaving no room for dissimulation; it explicitly makes a comment on the morals and ethics of the communities.

Talking about the sets in *Dogville*, Lars von Trier says,

We found that this concept has many advantages. For example, as there are only symbolic walls, we can see through them and follow what the other townspeople are doing all the time. We concentrate on the characters completely, as there are so few other elements involved. When you have seen the film, you should know more about the town than if the film had been shot in a real town. The idea is that the town should take form in the audience's imagination. (Kapla 2003: 207)

Von Trier stresses three important points: as the audience, we have visual authority over the space; the abstract sets allow us to pay more attention to the characters; and we are free to imagine a setting for this town. Taking these points into consideration, I would like to discuss how the lack of a realistic setting helps to create meaning in the story and how other stylistic elements are used to emphasize and support this odd use.

The nature of the sets in the films allows us to see what the characters cannot see; for example, in one of the most disturbing scenes in *Dogville*, Chuck (Stellan Skarsgård) rapes Grace inside his house while the townspeople go on peacefully with their lives and the children play outside (Figure 4.7). The fact that it is filmed on a soundstage on which there is an abstract representation of a village with no houses, no



**Figure 4.7** The rape scene in the background

doors or walls makes this scene powerful as it tackles the definitions of fiction and performance. In his article, 'Where is the world?', V. F. Perkins makes a distinction between our world and the fictional world of a film. The example he uses is a scene from Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once*, but his point could be applied to most films. He writes,

It is not that these characters are oblivious to the camera. There is no camera in their world. Their situation is interestingly contrasted with ours as spectators. We are aware of the mechanisms of presentation and have to be so to make sense of the movie's devices. (Perkins 2005: 24)

In *Dogville* and *Manderlay* Lars von Trier is pointing at the fine line drawn between our world and the fictional world to emphasise the meaning of the stories. The characters *are* in a town in the reality of the story world, so they *cannot see* what is happening. However the disturbance is more related to the fact that from our perspective, there are no walls to conceal anything and the actors *can see* just like us.<sup>28</sup> This scene gains a much more powerful effect when towards the end of the movie we realise that the characters would react in the same way even if they knew the truth about the rape. Perkins writes, 'That we can be present as an audience to witness the absence of witnesses is an index of the separation between our world and the world of fiction' (Perkins 2005: 19). This is no longer an index in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* because even in the absence of witnesses, unlike conventional filmmaking, we are shown the presence of actors. The films not only put the audience in the position to witness and confront hypocrisy, brutality, violence and injustice; they also make them demand a reaction and feel the responsibility as the only witnesses. In addition, the knowledge of the ability of the actors to *see* in reality creates an inclination to feel contempt towards the characters because it foregrounds the way in which these kinds of characters might deliberately ignore what they know to be true.

The use of minimal sets in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* reveals the moral, psychological and ethical values of the communities to be more significant to the construction of the stories than the physical presences of the town and the plantation. The films grant the opportunity to know more about the people of the town and the plantation in this way than if they had been shot on location. Our access to the space is almost unlimited and it contributes to the intensity of the narratives. There is nothing – except perhaps a backstage that does not belong to the filmic world – beyond the soundstages; the spatial boundaries of the narratives are clear. Bazin's idea of 'screen as a mask' that was discussed in the previous chapter does not apply here. The framing cannot suggest much off-screen because anything beyond the frame is already within limits. The reality of the filmic world includes the bare soundstages and our relationship with them, that is, what we can see with that which the soundstages offer us, contributes to complementing the stories. The lack of a realistic setting becomes part of the story as well as a feature of the storytelling. The soundstages construct a part of *how* the stories are told as much as *what* the stories are.

The use of soundstages has an affect on the conventional working conditions as well. Lars von Trier calls attention to the fact that 'the team of actors will be onstage all the time, because there are no walls between the buildings. We are going to live together, like a collective' (Kapla 2003: 212). There is a possibility that the actors' continuous collective presence on the set might also modify their performances. The rape scene in *Dogville* or the scene in which Grace whips Timothy (Isaach De Bankolé) in *Manderlay* are acted in the presence of all actors including the children.<sup>29</sup> Shooting the scenes collectively for stories that are directly related to conformity and collectivism may have prepared the ground for the roles of



the actors. The feeling of discomfort that the stories create for the audience was perhaps created for the actors as well while shooting. The content of the whipping scene deserves a mention in terms of how shooting it collectively on a bare soundstage contributes to the scene's intensity (Figure 4.8). Due to demand from the Manderlay community, Grace unwillingly decides to continue executing Mam's law,

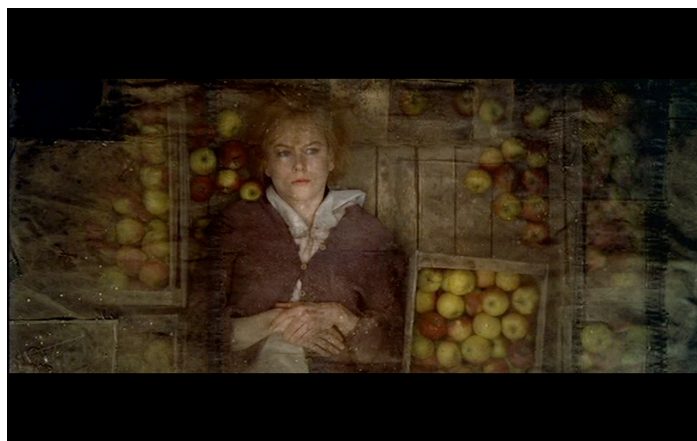


**Figure 4.8** Grace whips Timothy

which comprised the rules for slavery and was the only law in the plantation until she arrived. According to this, Grace needs to whip Timothy who gambled with the community's money. Timothy is tied to the iron fence and people gather around her to watch his punishment. After a short and touching speech about how brutal she thinks the people of Manderlay are, she drops the whip on the floor and starts to walk away. She is interrupted by Timothy still tied to the fence, who says that he is not at all surprised by the derogatory language she uses, but by her anger. 'Aren't you forgetting something', he asks, 'You made us'. His last words infuriate Grace, as she walks back, takes the whip and start to execute his punishment violently. In a moment of frustration, Grace rationalises her action and finds herself in the shoes of the slave owner. Von Trier uses rapid editing in these scenes; shots rarely exceed ten seconds. This choice also aggravates the discomfort of these collective scenes. The

bare soundstage allows for the visibility of this disturbing scene from all sides. It is the only event that exists; the only thing that we can look at. During production, the same thing would have been true for the actors on the soundstage: everybody is there at once and within the confined limits of the space.

Using the soundstages as settings for these two films also creates an awareness of the spatial limits of the town and the plantation, which prevents the audience from doubting the credibility of the script because it undermines some of the questions that immediately come to mind. We never wonder why Grace does not run away from Dogville on foot. As we learn from the voice over and the characters, one way leads to the next town where she can easily be caught and the other way leads to the Rocky Mountains, which are too risky to cross. These are the two given alternatives for leaving the town and they are facts of this fictional world. Anything that would look absurd and unnatural on a realistic setting looks credible here. In one of the scenes in *Dogville*, Grace finds a way to leave the town in Ben's (Zeljko Ivanek's) apple truck. This scene lasts about four minutes and represents the whole journey that Grace makes. The framing remains the same throughout the scene: it presents Grace from above the truck (Figure 4.9). Digital technology makes this viewpoint possible as it creates an impression of the camera seeing through the cloth that covers the back of



**Figure 4.9** Grace at the back of the apple truck

the truck. The camera is seemingly outside the truck; however, similar to the omniscient viewpoint prevailing on the soundstage where there are no walls, we have full access to the inside. The notion of time passing is indicated with a couple of superimpositions, after each of which Grace's position changes. Again, as on the soundstage, the transparency is limited: we never see what is happening beyond this frame. Grace supposedly travels to a town nearby where Ben is going to sell his apples. Instead of keeping his promise, Ben rapes her in the truck and in the end brings Grace back to Dogville, lying to the townspeople that she has sneaked in without notice. This four-minute drive takes us out of Dogville, but does not let us see what is there. The world beyond Dogville exists, but it is available to neither Grace nor us.

Both in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* the stories go to unexpected climaxes, but the outcomes remain unquestioned partly because of the abstract story world that the soundstages create. The only unbiased or uninterpreted fact we know related to their settings, before we make any implications or inferences, is that Dogville town and Manderlay plantation exist on soundstages with spatial restrictions. As Stig Björkman writes, von Trier is 'fascinated by the limits a given space imposes on' people (2003: 13). The limits of these soundstages, however, also expose the directions for us to follow the gist of the story rather than doubt the credibility of the sets' details. What we actually watch in the film is the recorded and edited material of performance on an almost-bare soundstage.

Overall, this aspect is the film's main focus: all elements of style work to support the unusual spaces in both films and the meaning they contribute to the stories. Therefore, they have two main roles: they redefine the functions of other stylistic elements and they complement the stories. The implicit concepts of visibility



itself; there is no more or no less to it. The film also ends with a similar zoom-in; and the first and last shots are not that different to each other, except the chalk lines are erased and the townspeople are immobile. They lie perfectly aligned with each other on the floor, because there's nothing left of Dogville. *Manderlay*'s opening scene is another zoom-in from high above into a map of the state of Alabama. The shot follows four familiar black cars driving across a map of America. The film ends with an opposing shot: as the camera zooms out from Alabama, we see Grace running north on the same map until she disappears.

The opening and closing shots of both films serve various purposes. They emphasise the audience's visual superiority: we are not only able to see through walls, we can also govern the viewpoint from up above the town. From the first moment in the films, we are put in a divine position because of the length of the zoom-ins and the height of the angles. The shots provoke a temptation to judge. These shots also give us directions about how to read the films: we will observe the town in general first and then find out the tiniest detail. Right from the start, visual omniscience and authority are what the films offer to us. The bird's eye view shots of the plantation and the town are interspersed throughout both movies. Every time we return to this point of view, we are reminded of our privilege in seeing the whole town from above. There are also shots from the top of the four different corners of the soundstage from where we can see the whole town at an oblique angle. In these scenes, although the action is actually taking place inside the borders of a house, we can see what is happening in other locations as well such as the rape scene discussed above. The main action remains on one part of the screen while we are allowed, via a zoom-out or a tracking shot, to penetrate visually inside the houses of the townspeople.

Conventionally, lighting is used to sustain the overall dramatic effect of the scene and intensify the moment, the acting and the setting or simply to create the necessary atmosphere. We do not always notice the lighting as an individual element of style, but it produces an effect in the whole. In *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, changes in lighting guide the viewer towards changes in time, mood, tone and the characters. The white background in *Dogville* and the beige floor in *Manderlay* signal that it is daytime. Colder tones of white and blue are used to indicate something bad is about to happen, while a softer, warmer yellow or daylight is used to mark the more joyful scenes. The difference in lighting in the scene where the townspeople of Dogville are looking at Grace after she is voted to stay and the scene of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration deserve a comparison. Similarly, in *Manderlay*, there is an obvious difference in the lighting of the locations when Grace is woken up from her dreams and taken to see that Claire is dead. In long shots, lighting tells us where to look – since all locations are visible – and chooses the viewpoint for us; for example, in the scene in *Manderlay* where Grace is fantasising about Timothy only two spots on the soundstage are lit. Grace is looking at where Timothy is and imagining how he looks like while we physically see Timothy naked.

Camera and lighting in the films help to establish time, space and the mood of the stories, which is also their function in the so-called invisible style of classical cinema. However, the difference is in the increased dependence on them: due to the scarcity and bareness of sets, they become more noticeable. Writing about the colours in *Dogville*, Robert Sklar observes that

[they] change with the season and time of day. There is a beyond, a bigger town and a road that leads there, but the surrounding space, what purports to be the horizon, the sky, is a uniform black or white, creating claustrophobia, heightened by von Trier's ever-whipping camera movements, which induce a wariness, a sense of panic. (Sklar 2004: 48)

As Sklar notes, lighting becomes part of the setting or the story, changing its conventional supportive function in cinematography. Camera and lighting also take on the roles of editing devices. Ryan Gilbey similarly argues, ‘crosscutting, or the use of the split screen, are the nearest equivalents in conventional film language to this juxtaposing’ (Gilbey 2006: 66). In the rape scene in *Dogville*, the camera tracks or zooms out to reveal what others are doing at the same time. The soundstage is brightly lit to show the interiors of every household and the streets. However, if the film had been shot in a realistic setting, there would have had to have been cuts to shots of other people and the final effect would not be the same. With this technique you can cut from one scene to the other with the help of the lighting or the camera, without physically cutting the shots, thus showing several actions happening at the same time. Therefore, camera and lighting techniques continuously point to the existence of these quasi-abstract sets. These two stylistic features interact to maintain the general feeling of visibility, reminding the audience’s visual supremacy. On the other hand, they also help to emphasise the performances and create a more realistically dramatic effect. While serving the narratives of the films, new possibilities and functions are born out of this interaction: the narration is conspicuous and there are new methods for the audience to *see*.

The voice-over narration provides an accompaniment to the primary visual narration<sup>30</sup> and it therefore guides the audience’s access to the narratives in *Dogville* and *Manderlay*. John Hurt, with his distinctively British accent and authoritative voice, narrates the film as if he is reading a novel to us. The voice gives us a sense of being present with us, but looking back into the past with a knowledge and vision we do not have.<sup>31</sup> Temporal, spatial and causal elements in the films are established with the voice-over narration. It is not a supporting element in the film that only permits

us access to the minds of the main characters, but an element which substitutes for description of the scenes, as in a novel. Not only do we only learn more about what the characters really think, but we also learn what the town is really like. The voice-over substitutes for a realistic set or location, establishing verbally what is lacking visually; it sometimes offers the only explanation of a scene or the characters' motives with irony. If the films were parts of a novel, the protagonist would be Grace and the narrator would have an ironic approach to her decisions and actions, preventing us from aligning ourselves with her as much as any other character. His descriptions of what Grace sees and thinks do not validate her decisions and actions, but lead us to doubt her more. The last sentences that the narrator says in both films indicate his indifference to and perhaps condescension towards the characters.<sup>32</sup>

The main purpose of this omniscient voice-over narration is to lead us to examine the characters in depth. If the films had been shot in a naturalistic setting, the voice-over narration might have seemed repetitive and unnecessary. However, because the films established their settings on bare soundstages, we are more eager to listen to the voice-over to learn about the missing pieces. On the other hand, the physical world inside the town, as much as the minds of the characters, comes to existence through this voice. Every time something *that is not there* is conveyed through the narration, the nature of its absence is hinted at. Even though we do not see it, we have to take it as present. The voice-over supplies what the narrative does not – or what the filmmaker does not want to – convey visually.

The abstract sets in both films are oddly opposed to the photographs in the credit sequences, which are the work of various famous photographers. A selection of Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs marks the ending of *Dogville* while Danish photographer Jacob Holdt's works dominate *Manderlay*'s finale.<sup>33</sup> Bo Fibiger



talks about how ‘with the insertion of the American snapshots’ *Dogville* – and unequivocally *Manderlay* – ‘shifts from being a mythically founded metaphor to an analogy’ (2003: 62). When contrasted with the minimal sets, the meanings of the photographs are emphasised, manipulated and altered. In both films, time and space in the setting have been dismantled: we are made to imagine and believe that it is the 1930s as we see Nicole Kidman walk through non-existent doors. The setting of Depression-era America, which does not exist, could simply be used for its familiarity and functionality; the stories could be interpreted as stories about humanity in general, free of any associations with the settings. While the photographs directly relate to the fictional worlds to historical events, the selection, order and the framing of the photographs delineate the director’s point of view.

Holger Römers points to ‘the reciprocal relation of photos and film narrative in *Dogville*’ and suggests that ‘just as any reading of the narrative is inevitably influenced by the photo montage of the credit sequence, so, in return, perception of the photos is necessarily shaped by the preceding film narrative’ (2005). It is impossible not to compare the people in the photos with the fictional characters in the films. The people in the photographs may have been the people in the town and the plantation, similar to the ones imagined by von Trier. Lars von Trier creates the atmosphere for us throughout the films to react to these photographs. By contrasting the fictional world with the reality of the photographs he has a direct influence on our reading of the story. His choice of photographs at the end of *Dogville* has, in Römers’s words, ‘iconographic similarities’ with the town and the townspeople, which leads us to compare these representations with his fictional worlds. In addition, he intervenes polemically in the final sequence of *Manderlay*. While we hear ‘Do you remember your President Nixon?’ in the lyrics, Bush’s photograph is seen on the

screen. Bowie continues, ‘Do you remember the bills you have to pay or even yesterday?’ and the following image is of a black man sitting. What we soon realise in the far right background, with the help of a zoom-in, are the World Trade Centre buildings in New York.

Apart from completing a photomontage created by Lars von Trier, each photograph has an author and historical context on its own. Writing about the famous FSA photographs, Susan Sontag notes,

Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience. The immensely gifted members of the Farm Security Administration photographic project of the late 1930s (among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee) would take dozens of frontal pictures of one of their sharecropper subjects until satisfied that they had gotten just the right look on film – the precise expression on the subject’s face that supported their own notions about poverty, light, dignity, texture, exploitation, and geometry. In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are. (1979: 16-17)

With the montage of photographs Lars von Trier reproduces another interpretation.

The aim of the FSA photographs may have been ‘to demonstrate the value of the people photographed’ (Sontag 1979: 62); photographers may have had aesthetical concerns during shooting; and over time the photographs may have become defining images for an era. However, all these associations are secondary to von Trier’s proposition: similar people, towns, hence stories, could have existed in reality. The abstract sets in the films, therefore, not only nourish the themes but also give the director more space to impose his point of view.

The idea of the script for *Dogville* was taken from ‘Pirate Jenny’, a song from *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht.<sup>34</sup> Using the elements of style in an unconventional way von Trier has referred to the techniques of alienation and disruption, but the outcome is an example of a discontinuity film. It is not a

coincidence that these stylistic elements have come together to tell a story about a closed community in which conformity and hypocrisy are the latent fundamental values. The absence of a realistic setting in the two films shapes the film style and narrative. The invisible walls of *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, expose the extent of brutality that humankind can collectively commit. Referring to the bare sets, Adam Atkinson writes, ‘This staged theatricality allows von Trier to eliminate the distinctions between public and private, inside and outside’ (Atkinson 2005). Our position allows us to see things that the characters are either hiding from each other or unaware of. On the other hand, there are things that neither we, nor the actors for that matter, can physically see; but the characters in the fictional world can. The things that we cannot see, however, are either insignificant to the story or provided by the narrator. Stripping the sets bare gives a supernatural quality to our perception while it takes away some of our basic abilities.

*Dogville* and *Manderlay* are about transparency and issues of visibility, invisibility, truth and lies. It is no coincidence that the film’s odd stylistic use of abstract soundstages also points to these concepts at the heart of the narrative. Style not only allows the spectator to look at the film in a different way, pushes, guides or forces him to see things that he would not have noticed otherwise; but it also, by its nature, adds to the narrative itself. The films encourage us to examine their styles and question why such a choice has been made.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on a variety of films from different periods in order to scrutinise how discontinuity is created through unstable and unusual narrations and what kind of functions it undertakes. Although such cases were mainly grouped

under four categories in the chapter, these categories are not mutually exclusive; the common characteristics of these films can intersect. As mentioned earlier, creating discontinuity is largely related to upsetting the audience's expectations; anything that conceals or removes the associations we make with a film's narrative becomes an element of discontinuity. In this sense, sudden narrational changes create the appropriate conditions for producing immediate discontinuity. What this chapter has discussed is whether this immediate perception of discontinuity remains constant throughout a film; in other words, whether an element that interrupts our understanding of a narrative develops to assume other functions.

As an example of this, one could point to the way that the interaction of fiction and non-fiction adds a jumpy feel to *Viaggio in Italia*'s narration. The film's fictional drama is highly contrasted to the everyday life in Naples. The use of documentary-like shots, even if it is for a few moments, interrupts our position as viewers of drama. The drama does not stop, but the film reminds us of its artificial nature and that it is something made in Naples. This discontinuity is not as strong as, for instance, the non-linearity in *Marienbad* or the interference in *Persona*, but it has a similar function. The play between fiction and non-fiction disengages us from the narrative, making it difficult to assume a single standpoint from which to look. However, this difficulty also helps us to appreciate the film in different ways: Katherine's foreignness in Naples and her drifting apart from her husband becomes stronger and more meaningful when evaluated with Ingrid Bergman's own image as an actor shooting a film in a foreign land. Thus, it extends the strategy of *Stromboli*, in which Karin/Bergman is alienated from her husband and the island community. Shifts in *Viaggio*'s narration provide the audience with viewpoints that contribute to the depth of the film's story.

*Viaggio in Italia* can be thought of a mild case of genre-hopping, as the film uses diverse generic elements within scenes. The two examples that were subsequently discussed within this second group, *Tirez sur la pianiste* and *Johnny Guitar*, stand on two opposite ends. While *Tirez* freely jumps from one genre to the other, *Johnny Guitar*'s changes in tone are subtle and its overarching genre remains the Western. In the former this stylistic characteristic creates a discontinuity similar to the previous example; it does not disrupt the narrative, but it interrupts the relationship we form with it. As this is a case of upsetting narration, the narrative continues within the established temporal, spatial and causal unities. However, it is the way the story is told that changes, providing the audience to take a different standpoint to look at it. In *Johnny Guitar*, narrational shifts do not create discontinuity; they are minor changes in tone, which contribute to the richness of the film's highly stylised way of contrasting characters.

As evident in these films and in the other films analysed or mentioned in this chapter, *Une femme est une femme*, *Yadon Ilaheyya*, *Psycho*, *Eraserhead* and *Mulholland Dr.*, discontinuities are directly related to the audience's expectations from a film narrative. If a film starts out with a relatively steady narration, we do not usually expect it to switch to a different mode, especially not to a conflicting one, such as the case in *Yadon Ilaheyya*. Generally, these switches are only acceptable when the genre itself allows for them, such as in musicals. The final two examples of this chapter, *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, however, present a different condition. Unlike the other cases, these two films play with some of the fundamental stylistic characteristics of filmmaking. A primary and static element in conventional narrative cinema, the illusion of a continuous space created through continuity editing, is dismantled and transformed into the absolute presentation of a closed, discontinuous

soundstage. While taking away the cinematic setting, they introduce a new definition of film space that is more visible and more abstract. These films disrupt the convention of the unity of space; the choice is entirely non-realistic, but it does not intervene in our engagement with the filmic world; rather it makes a statement as an element of style. As is the case in the other examples, this is an interruption in our expectations and it causes a discontinuity to the extent that we get used to it. Such an odd use of style, though, creates fresh possibilities for film narration as well as it contributes to the meaning in the films' stories.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The film received negative reviews at the time of its release such as ‘unbalanced composition of shots’ (Guarner 1970: 58) and ‘insult to the intelligence of the audience’ (Bondanella 1993: 98). See also Brunette (1987). All these accounts state that the critics’ and audiences’ frustration was due to the film’s unconventional narrative structure.

<sup>2</sup> Mulvey draws attention to the pattern in this randomness as she thematically groups the different sequences; she argues that ‘each [sequence] has a sketchy internal structure. Themes of interest to Rossellini lie behind Katherine’s condescending curiosity and touch aspects of life that he found both difficult and interesting’ (2000: 103).

<sup>3</sup> The effect of these documentary-like shots inserted within the fiction is abrupt. However these images cannot be readily categorised as counter-narrative. Tom Brown writes about the many varied meanings and effects of direct address in films, which are determined by ‘the surrounding text, the details of its performance and the wider rhetoric of its placement’ (2012: 166).

<sup>4</sup> Bondanella suggests that there is a ‘theme of looking’ (1993: 103) and it is further emphasised by Katherine’s visit to tourist sites.

<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, Godard has engaged with this notion of interplay throughout his career in many different ways. I am referring mostly to his early work here. Similar characteristics can be found in, for example, *Vivre sa vie* (1962) or *Bande à part* (1964).

<sup>6</sup> For some writers, this is a mark of Godard. Naomi Greene writes, ‘Godard saw as the interplay of “reality” and “illusion” (understood as theatre, spectacle and fiction) at the heart of all great films’ (2007: 97). Similarly, Eaton and MacCabe argue that ‘in Godard’s films [...] categories of “documentary” and “fiction” are so continuously thrown into crisis in the manipulation of [cinematic] technology’ (1980: 110). According to Richard Brody, ‘Godard would [...] lay bare the methods by which the beloved illusions are achieved’ (2008: 108).

<sup>7</sup> Gilberto Perez argues that ‘Godard purposely brings forward the documentary of the actor as something distinct from the character being played. If an actor’s performance is an icon of the character, the documentary of the actor is an index of the person giving the performance’ (2000: 37).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, many critics call this film a documentary: ‘Never has a plot had so little to do with what a picture was really about. *Woman* is a documentary not merely of Karina but of the sheer otherness of all women’ (Sarris 1968: 62). ‘The film has been justly defined as a documentary on Anna Karina’ (Cozarinsky 1969: 30). ‘*A Woman is a Woman* is one of the most beautiful documentaries I have ever seen devoted to a woman’ (Labarthe 1970: 155).

<sup>9</sup> Originally from Denmark, Karina is not a native speaker, which is highlighted many times in the film, including the famous ending dialogue.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, Truffaut confirmed this in many of his interviews: he ‘systematically practiced a mélange of genres and [...] didn’t hesitate to parody’ (Baby 1972: 23); he wanted ‘to make a film without a subject’ (Cukier and Gryn 1972: 13), ‘to make some formal discoveries’ (15) and ‘to go from surprise to surprise’ (Baby 1972: 22). ‘Above all [he] was looking for the explosion of a genre by mixing genres’ (quoted in Monaco 1976: 41). However, he also indicated that he sometimes took risks with the form and once ‘attributed the failure of his film to its transgressive mixture of genres and tones’ (Greene 2007: 101).

<sup>11</sup> According to Braudy, this ‘contrast between Charlie’s hesitations and the voice-over narration’ is an example of how the film’s style corresponds to its theme of improvisation and there is a ‘dual consciousness of [...] the pressure of the stereotyped plot and the resistance of the “haphazard” scenes’ (1972: 6). This dual consciousness is perhaps the source of what Kael names the ‘tension in the method’ (1972: 79) that Truffaut employs. With this method, the film never fully discloses absolute portraits of its characters or provides a complete story; as Pearson and Rhode observe, ‘thread of a tale may be arbitrarily picked up, played with, and just as suddenly dropped’ (1961: 161). Petrie explains it as ‘a tension [...] between what we expect and we actually see on the screen’ (1972: 153). Monaco writes that Truffaut believed that ‘film art was the result of the tension created between the traditional forms of a work and the filmmaker’s struggle with them’ (1976: 54).

<sup>12</sup> Many essays and reviews about the film draw attention to its unconventional style: there is ‘a freedom of narrative’ and ‘the plot passes into the background to the profit of the characters and their

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relationships with each other' (Kas 1972: 55). 'This is an apparently detached film' (Török 1972: 71) that 'invite[s] the viewer to look for [the essence] off-screen' (74).

<sup>13</sup> Shatnoff agrees that Truffaut makes 'a deliberate destruction of the expected order of events' (1963: 5), 'but he's able to balance [...] combinations so tastefully they "work"' (3). Similarly Anzalone writes 'The violation of temporal logic in the mise-en-scene creates a distortion that paradoxically is not at all experienced as disorienting' (1998: 55). Interestingly some writers have referred to this style as a representation of reality: 'the swift changes of mood and pace [...] are an attempt to match his form more nearly to the way life usually develops' (Reisz and Millar 1972: 99); the 'tension in the method gives us the excitement of [...] *our* life' (Kael 1972: 79); 'it is the real world [Truffaut] has shown us' (Petrie 1972: 151); the film 'seem[s] to approach "real life"' (Brunette 1993: 11). Cardullo takes this argument further and claims that this is not the real world 'but an aesthetic equivalent of the world as Charlie perceives it' (1985: 79) and the film 'tells what it sees as the truth about the human condition at a certain period in history' (80).

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, few books on the Western genre refer to *Johnny Guitar* in detail and most of the criticism involves discussions about the film having female protagonists or altered gender roles: '*Johnny Guitar* further interrogates the masculine world of the Western' (Lusted 2003: 257); 'the erotic was added to the genre, as in Joan Crawford's ludicrous *Johnny Guitar*' (Fenin and Everson 1962: 276); 'the effect of such casting is [...] to produce [...] extravagant sexual symbolism and innuendo' (French 1973: 68).

<sup>15</sup> James Harvey interestingly finds traces of the musical genre in the film and writes that 'the big romantic scene, nearly halfway into the movie, between the two leads [...] has the structure and feel of a song number – though this time without a song' (2001: 311); 'it has almost the same sort of impact as [...] a great Astaire-Rogers dance (314). Geoff Andrew suggests that 'references to opera, myth, Greek tragedy, romantic melodrama, even surrealism' can be made as the film 'veers between violent hysteria and melancholy lyricism' (2004: 71).

<sup>16</sup> Films of this kind are common in mainstream and classical cinemas. The *Men in Black* films (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, 2002, 2012) are a hybrid of comedy and science fiction. *Chicago* (Rob Marshall, 2002), although originally adapted from a stage musical, combines comedy and crime as well. These films rely on genre conventions and tackle certain iconic images more than usual.

<sup>17</sup> The title translates as *Divine Intervention*, which summarises the bizarre interventions in the film. The transition from one genre convention to the other is so immediate and far-fetched that the only way to describe them is *deus ex machina*.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Durgnat (2002: 110-111); Knight and McKnight (1999: 117-118); Mulvey (2006: 86).

<sup>19</sup> Famously, this unconventional narrative structure helped movie theatres in America adopt a new policy about not admitting the audience after the film started, which was the case up to that time (Hawkins 2002: 374).

<sup>20</sup> Mulvey thinks that Hitchcock 'assumes an audience that is able to follow his moves' (2006: 86) and Wood argues that the film is his 'ultimate achievement to date in the technique of audience participation' (1989: 146-7).

<sup>21</sup> These are perhaps simple deductions made according to occurrences, references and associations from the films. I do not think these figures have unique meanings or explanations. Talking about the prologue in *Eraserhead*, David Lynch explains that 'it's very important what goes on there [...]; there's certain things that happen in that sequence that are a key to the rest' (Rodley 1997: 63). When asked whether his 'resistant to any single meaning placed on [his] work', he replies 'I like things that have a kernel of something in them. They have to be abstract. The more concrete they are, the less likely that this thing will happen' (63).

<sup>22</sup> Feuer examines the transformation of musicals in three periods: 'period of experimentation in which the conventions are established (1929-33), classical period during which a balance reigns (1933-53) [and] a period of reflexivity dominated by parody' (1982: 90). The musicals that I am referring to here belong to the first two categories. The last category, in fact, comprises mostly hybrid genre films.

<sup>23</sup> Gunning argues that musicals are a continuation of 'the cinema of attractions' (1997b: 57).



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<sup>24</sup> The two terms ‘set’ and ‘setting’ are used synonymously here because the use of the soundstages in the films makes it difficult to separate the two. Details of this condition will further be discussed in the section.

For an essay derived from this section see Akçalı (2009).

<sup>25</sup> The final film in the trilogy, announced to be titled *Washington*, still remains unmade.

<sup>26</sup> Our expectations of a conventional setting are limited. Only in certain genres, such as animation or science fiction, can we readily accept a narrative that disregards these expectations. This is why I use cinematic and realistic because the two concepts have become synonyms through the history of the medium.

<sup>27</sup> The sets also resemble video game designs with minimal use of props.

<sup>28</sup> Koutsourakis draws attention to another aspect of this condition and claims that ‘von Trier plays with [the actors’] attempt to pretend that they do not see something that takes place in front of them’ (2011: 209).

<sup>29</sup> In the documentary *The Road to Manderlay*, Bryce Dallas Howard talks about the difficulties she experienced while shooting this scene. The documentary can be found in the double DVD release of both films by Zentropa Entertainment.

<sup>30</sup> George M. Wilson defines primary visual narration as ‘the totality of visual information presented in the course of the film’ (1992: 211).

<sup>31</sup> In an article about Ophuls’s *Le Plaisir* (1952), Perkins writes ‘The voice falls on our ears as the spirit of the writing, not as a phantom but as what lives on in the work of fiction after the death of its creator’ (2009: 16). The function of voice-over narration in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* could be compared to this. As Perkins writes about another Ophuls film, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), ‘the impression [...] of an impossible presence is reinforced’ (2003) by such a use. Here, Perkins refers to the way Lisa reads her letter in the film: ‘The fiction is almost of Lisa’s seeing the past now as Stefan reads about it’ (2003).

<sup>32</sup> The narrator’s final words in *Dogville* are: ‘Whether Grace left Dogville, or on the contrary, Dogville left her and the world in general, is a question of a more artful nature that few would benefit from by asking, and even fewer by providing an answer, and nor indeed, will it be answered here’. *Manderlay* ends with: ‘America had profit at its hand, discreetly perhaps, but if anybody refused to see a helping hand, he really only had himself to blame’.

<sup>33</sup> Farm Security Administration (FSA), part of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies, conducted a photography program funded by the government between the years 1935-1944. Many photographers were assigned to document the poverty in the rural areas of America during the Depression in order for the government to improve the farming conditions. While most of these images of faces and places have turned into symbols representing that era, a considerable amount of critical study has been done on FSA photography program and its photographers. Online access to FSA photographs: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html>.

Information about Jacob Holdt, his picture gallery and his book *American Pictures* can be found on [www.american-pictures.com](http://www.american-pictures.com).

<sup>34</sup> Von Trier mentioned this in several instances including an interview in *The Guardian* (Björkman 2004b).

## Chapter Five

### OTHER CASES OF DISCONTINUITY

#### Introduction

Each of the last three chapters focused on a different type of discontinuity in cinema and through detailed film analyses discussed the functions that each type bears. Non-linear narratives, absences in storytelling, and shifts and interferences in filmic narrations are some of the most common forms that discontinuity employs in cinema. As mentioned previously, continuity and discontinuity are defined by our expectations of a linear and comprehensible storyline told within the established reality of the filmic world. So far, the cases in this thesis exemplified how the use of discontinuity can contribute to creating meaning, emphasizing certain themes and even forming continuity. Similarly, this chapter continues to examine different cases of discontinuity. However, instead of concentrating on one category, it looks at a variety of examples that the other chapters exclude. In this sense, it should be considered as a short supplementary chapter designed to analyse cases that further clarify and support the previous discussions.

The chapter begins with an overview of discontinuity in avant-garde films,<sup>1</sup> which leads to a brief exploration of the co-dependent relationship of avant-garde and narrative cinemas. The discontinuous style that marks the nature of non-narrative cinema is discussed in terms of how it may have had an impact on narrative films. I will consider in what ways the uses of discontinuity differ in avant-garde filmmaking and what functions similar uses have in narrative cinema. For this reason, Luis Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or* (1930) and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) are chosen, as they both stand in between the categories of experimental and narrative

filmmaking practices, displaying characteristics from each. Lastly, a short analysis of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) is included because of the film's alleged influences on experimental cinema. This analysis concentrates on the film's style of storytelling with flashbacks.

The rest of the chapter focuses on a variety of films from different periods, genres, filmmakers and contexts. These films are continuous in nature, but are marked by a prominent discontinuous sequence or a cluster of discontinuous scenes, which usually are crucial to the story. The chapter aims to find out what such uses deliver in terms of richness of film style and narrative. The analyses are made primarily with references to these sequences in order to examine their significance and contribution to our appreciation and understanding of the films. A short section is devoted to *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) because it is one of the well-known examples of work that breaks from classical continuity. This section looks at the effects and functions of spatial inconsistencies created by stylistic uses such as oblique angles, extreme close-ups and missing eye-matches. It discusses what such uses suggest beyond their apparent task of causing discontinuity.

### **Discontinuity and the Avant-garde: *L'Âge d'or*, 2001: A Space Odyssey and *Citizen Kane***

Discontinuity and fragmentation in narrative and style are perhaps most commonly associated with avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s. One of the fundamental problems of the filmic medium for these artists was its inherent photographic realism combined with the sequentiality of the filmstrip that created duration and the dominance of narrative in mainstream cinema, which are some of the criteria discussed in this thesis for the definition of continuity. Avant-garde

filmmakers wanted to emphasise subjectivity against the de facto objectivity of the camera lens and the illusion of movement that the camera created. At the same time, some criticised the spread of classical storytelling techniques that justified a linear storyline. This aspiration towards representing subjectivity on screen mostly emerged as practices that broke, or that did not allow in the first place, a linear and coherent understanding of time, space and causality. Hence, Man Ray used nails and pins instead of a camera to manufacture images on the celluloid in *La Retour a la Raison* (1923); Fernand Léger incorporated loops of indefinite human movement – for instance, a woman on a swing or another one climbing up the stairs – in *Ballét Mécanique* (1924); René Clair experimented with fast- and slow-motion, superimpositions and pace of cutting in *Entr'acte* (1924). Such uses were, needless to say, pioneering in the period that they were tried out; soon after, they were borrowed by filmmakers such as Godard, Resnais and Bergman in Europe and, later on, by a new generation of Hollywood filmmakers in the 1960s and the 1970s, including Scorsese and Rafelson. However, since the mid-1990s, some of these forms of discontinuity have become more common in narrative cinema. All the contemporary films that were analysed in the previous chapters carry the imprints of such a style.

The similarity between avant-garde filmmaking and narrative cinema may be surprising as one of the intentions of the former was to produce something in opposition to the latter; however, these two categories have never been exclusively distinct.<sup>2</sup> According to John Pruitt, Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) carries traces of the influence of the dream sequence from Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, P. Adams Sitney suggests that cinematography in *Citizen Kane* (1941) had an affect on Maya Deren's *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1943).<sup>4</sup> *Spellbound*'s (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) dream sequence was designed by Salvador Dalí<sup>5</sup> and a recent

example, *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), uses tricks that Surrealists utilised.<sup>6</sup> Parker Tyler discusses the perpetual dialogue between these two seemingly oppositional modes of filmmaking.<sup>7</sup> According to him, the 'big Experimental film cult' existed in commercial cinema and the little cult belonged to avant-garde circles yet they were mutually influential. Tyler writes that '*Last Year in Marienbad* [is] proof that a big commercial film can behave just like a little avant-garde film' (2000: 378) and argues that

the reason for this successful breakthrough of the avant-garde movement into the commercial film domain is because men such as Bergman and Antonioni have imitated, in substance, the best examples of little Experimental filmmaking, as begun in *L'Âge d'or* and *The Blood of a Poet*; they take personal charge of the story invention and the scenario and, to some extent, the camera itself. (382)

Conversely, the little Experimental cult imitated the more professional or more expensive filmmaking practices of commercial cinema. Sponsored by a French aristocrat, Luis Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or* (1930), for instance, is more than an hour long and does not fall into the category of short and low-budget avant-garde films, hence, making it hard to be classified as either narrative or experimental. Its storyline is also less abstract compared to its precursors; as Buñuel has described:

It's a clear, straightforward film, with no mystery [...] Clarity, method and calculation presided over the preparation of the scenario; with little or no automatism and at the expense of spontaneity and dream. Correspondingly the film style of *L'Âge d'or* is largely functional and unobtrusive with limited camera movement and little trick photography – as if to give it the authority of a documentary [...] Avant-garde fast cutting gives way to a more normal take-length of five and a half seconds. (Buñuel in Short 2003: 108)

Indeed, the film's form approaches that of a narrative film; although Buñuel exploits 'unexplained but enticing images' (Gould 1976: 60) to create a Surrealist dream-like atmosphere, 'cuts from one location and time period to another with swift abandon' (67) and utilises 'a perverse iconography to express [Surrealism's] rebellious critique of culture' (Weiss 1998: 161), there is still a linear storyline that can be followed.

The film's narrative is divided into three parts depicting past, present and future. It starts out with a short documentary about scorpions;<sup>8</sup> as Raymond Durgnat argues 'just as a dream breaks off as it nears its climax, the film abruptly switches to its second episode' (1968: 38) and thereafter 'another documentary begins' (41) in which we find ourselves in Imperial Rome. There is a big gap between these different times and spaces yet the connection between them is maintained by the two protagonists and the story of their love and desire. Referring to this swift jump between distinct narrative forms and the lack of a temporal and spatial continuity, Robert Short argues that 'the film wilfully mixes genres: fiction and documentary, pseudo-historical reconstruction and contemporary melodrama' (2003: 110)<sup>9</sup> and 'the film's leaps across time are [...] about relating a historical past to the present' (109).<sup>10</sup> The constant element in these episodes is the humorous and provocative contrast between the modernised individual and his/her uncontrollable primitive sexual desires, represented through the depiction of the story of two lovers. There are obvious gaps and jumps in their story; we are never sure when and where the incidents are taking place, whether the characters are dreaming, fantasising or what is reality. However, the main themes that the film explores are obvious and the scenes can be read in terms of their contribution to these themes even though there may be missing links between them. Continuity is not an essential criterion for avant-garde films. Generic conventions encourage us to ignore the prevalent discontinuity; watching an avant-garde film, we do not expect things to make sense or cohere; we are prepared to be disturbed.

Expectations of a Surrealist film entitled critics not to interpret *L'Âge d'or*, yet some still felt prompted to analyse its quasi-linear narrative structure and relate the fragmented form to its content. Francisco Aranda writes that 'the narrative is a great

virtue of *L'Âge d'or*: through apparently disconnected facts there runs an internal logic' (1976: 82); using the same phrase, Robert Short explains that 'it would be a mistake to dismiss [it] as just a collection of disparate gags. The microstructure may be disconcerting but there is an order to the thematic and ideological macrostructure... a powerful *internal logic* [my emphasis] behind [its] juxtaposition of contraries (2003: 110-111). In other words, the fragmented form in *L'Âge d'or* seems to be discounted by a logical order in the narrative and comfortably explained as a part of the theme of frustration that is pertinent to Surrealist practice.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that *Eraserhead*'s use of surrealist imagery, which was analysed in the previous chapter, approximates *L'Âge d'or* in this way; sexual displeasure finds its form in restraining the construction of a coherent and meaningful narrative.

The aim behind the use of such a fragmented form for the modernist avant-gardes was mostly political and ideological.<sup>12</sup> Temporal, spatial or causal disruptions in films corresponded to their provocative attack on the established system. Although both Surrealists and Dadaists, for instance, were actively involved in politics, this was not only a revolt against capitalism and fascism during the time of The Great Depression and the rise of Nazism, it was also directed at the spread of narrative and drama-oriented filmmaking practices. Narrative (and delivering meaning through it) was considered a reflection of the established ideological system. Therefore, the aim behind the use of such a style was mainly in relation to the context, which inevitably changed in time even though similar styles were repeated.

One of the most popular stylistic choices that mainstream narrative films have inherited from the avant-garde is fragmentation and non-linearity as a storytelling tool; this structure sometimes becomes so obvious that parts of the story are lost or left incomplete. However, in either case, this use is integrated as a subject in films

and there is usually a logical explanation for it in the narrative. The adoption of non-linearity into the mainstream involved turning it into another type of convention while effacing its intentional attack or criticism of conventions. There are examples, however, that bridge the categories of avant-garde and mainstream film. If *L'Âge d'or* leans towards the avant-garde, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), a film that shares many characteristics with it, leans towards the category of mainstream fiction films. *2001* is not based on a strict narrative. It comprises four main parts, whose storylines are never completed, explained or linked to one another. As with *L'Âge d'Or*, *2001* does not tell a story but tries to provoke questions. These films' narratives are made up of fragmented sequences; there are traces of stories but they are incomplete. However, this incompleteness has significance in these narratives. Many writers have commented on the 'open-ended' structure of *2001* and discussed the need to fill in the blanks in order to understand the story.<sup>13</sup> The first part of *2001* portrays the beginnings of humankind as gorillas struggle to survive in rivalry and violence. The second and third parts consist of missions in space; these parts project a documentary-like conception of the future that show details from space travel and envision a worrying and conflicting relationship between machines and humankind.<sup>14</sup> The last part is an abstract depiction of an indefinite space and time, which could be interpreted as a black hole, a state of unconsciousness or a womb, into which astronaut Dave (Keir Dullea) has fallen. The links between the parts are weak, emphasising the sense of fragmentation. The narrative is not just open-ended; the beginning is left open as well, but this mystery is a subject with which the film deals.<sup>15</sup>

*2001* heavily relies on image and sound without attempting to construct a cause and chain effect between its four parts to drive the story forward. Some critics



have built their analyses of *2001* by focusing on concepts that the film evokes or tackles, such as movement (Michelson 2000), affect (Sperb 2006), and ambiguity and plurality of meaning (Mainar 1999). In each case, the analyses draw on the film's dependence on images and its lack of a conventional storyline.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the writers deal with questions similar to those of modernist avant-garde filmmakers. Mario Falsetto writes, 'The film's concerns are primarily perceptual' (1994: 119); he then asks, 'how a narrative film do[es] justice to the idea of representing interior experience' (126) and argues that 'the film's challenge is how to create an experience that is at once individuated and universal' (127). The abstract shapes and colours in space juxtaposed with the human eye are not only Dave's voyage, but a visual voyage designed for us, representing the ambiguities of life. In that sense, the film never strives to complete or present a narrative, it rather takes us on an 'odyssey' in a form similar to a song indicated by the intertitles and the intermission in the middle of the film.

*2001*'s style is its narrative: the mystery of life remains and we continue living, experiencing it, without ever finding out what it means. It is true that there are many gaps in *2001*'s story; however, the gaps and unsolved mysteries relate to humankind's incapacities, which are the subjects that the film explores. The film's main questions are these mysteries and conflicting incapacities, rather than what happened to the spaceship or what the mission was about. Yet, there is one recurring symbol throughout the film: the black monolith. This conspicuous object, with its dominant presence, draws people to it in all parts. Moreover, its discovery induces a celebration as much as curiosity and anxiety; nonetheless, the reason for its presence is never explained. The monolith substitutes for all things unexplained and the film feels as if it were designed to celebrate this uncertainty.<sup>17</sup> Don Daniels proposes that

the monolith 'is a concrete representation of the causal principle which we take for granted in works of narrative art' (1970/71: 30). Daniels' argument suggests that the symbol for the causality is there, but it does not symbolise one thing; the inexplicability of the narrative is paralleled with the inexplicability of the main theme that *2001* explores. Discontinuity is a function with which the film constructs its own continuity. In other words, the otherwise puzzling effect of the film's discontinuous style is reduced by the fact that the same issue is the film's principal subject matter. The film uses non-linearity and absence of causality as modes of narration while it questions the circularity of life and its many inexplicable meanings.

Although not as obviously fragmented as *2001*, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) is one of the most famous example of discontinuity being used as a storytelling tool and it has been the subject of much film criticism and theory. *Citizen Kane* deserves attention both as an experimental film in narrative cinema and as a film that has influenced avant-garde cinema. The purpose of referring to *Citizen Kane* is not to present a new analysis, but to recall its non-linear narrative and question the functions of this stylistic choice.

*Kane's* apparent storyline of a journalist looking for the meaning behind a dying man's last words has a non-linear structure, created with the famous use of flashbacks that produce additional narratives.<sup>18</sup> Although the meaning of Rosebud is revealed to us in the end, many other questions generated by the film are not fulfilled with this single answer. The disconnected structure of the film, therefore, is quite fitting with the story: the non-chronological and overlapping narrative creates a coil of incidents, characters, images, words and sounds that multiply the unknown facts in Kane's life. As Andrew Sarris observes, 'each flashback overlaps with at least one of the others so that the same event or period is seen from two or three points of view'

(2000: 31). Discontinuity in *Citizen Kane* is central to the main theme; the film will never provide an exact answer to the questions raised about Kane. Shifts in time and perception between and within each flashback sequence produce many gaps in our knowledge. However, as Mulvey writes, this is how ‘*Citizen Kane* has, built into the structure, the need to think back and reflect on what has taken place in the main body of the film as soon as it finishes’ (2004: 18). Discontinuity in this film functions as a narrational tool which provides different perceptions to construct the character of the protagonist. As Bruce Kawin observes, ‘Although much of the film operates on revolutionarily non-Eisensteinian principles (as Bazin has demonstrated), the narrative structure itself does work like montage. Each view of Kane has a dialectical relationship with every other, and the contrasts prompt the audience to conceptualize Kane themselves’ (1978: 43).

The multiple viewpoints and their independence and disorder add to the ambiguity about Kane’s life. Discontinuity is one of the main themes in *Citizen Kane*; the film concludes with the main question unanswered for the characters. The narrative is, obviously, not limited to this question of what Rosebud is, but it is mainly ‘an examination of character’ (Welles quoted in Mulvey 2004: 80).

Therefore, the flashbacks complement the story; they are necessary to create the multiple meanings larger than the main question asked in the filmic world. However, continuity in the chronological narrative of Thompson’s visits partly conceals gaps and postpones any ambiguities to the end. ‘The centreless labyrinth’, which is how Borges refers to *Citizen Kane*, is both the form and the content of the film (1971: 128).

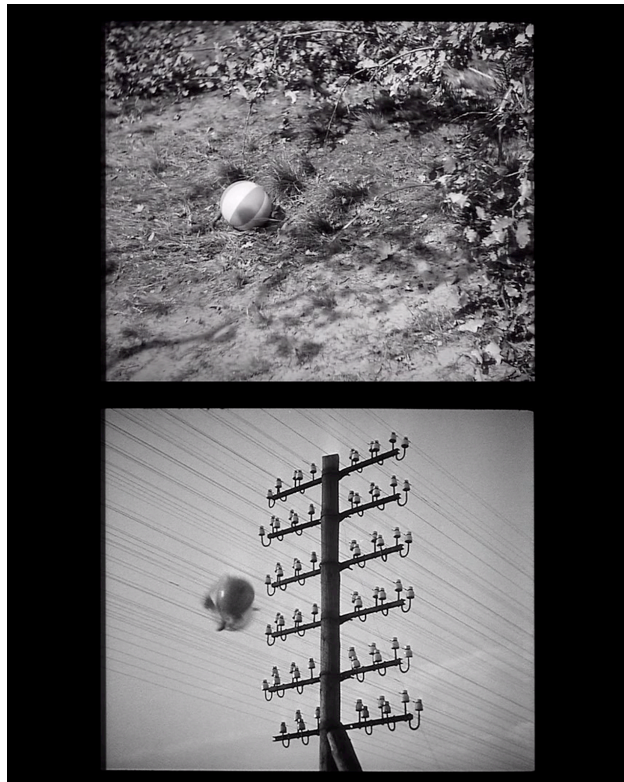
### **Discontinuity within unique scenes**

Some films, even though they have a continuous and linear narrative overall, make use of fragmented, non-linear or disjointed scenes that are not necessarily directly related to the main storyline or explained in detail. These are often visually overwhelming scenes that sometimes contain key images of the narrative even though these images usually stay on the screen for a short time and we never see them again.<sup>19</sup> Fritz Lang tells the story of the child murderer in *M* (1931), adopting a visual form similar to its avant-garde contemporaries.<sup>20</sup> One of the most noticeable stylistic choices in the film is the juxtaposition of discontinuous images with silence and the use of parallel cutting with overlapping dialogue.

The most prominent sequence in the film, Elsie Beckmann's (Inge Landgut's) kidnapping, is an example of both usages. Elsie's mother looks at the chiming clock on the wall, smiling; the next shot is of the school entrance where parents presumably wait for their children to come out as we hear the chiming bells of the clock tower on the screen. The following shot is of the mother again, preparing food; and the subsequent one is of Elsie trying to cross the street. From this point onwards, the scene sets these two parallel events against each other as the shots continue to alternate between the portrayal of the worried mother waiting for her daughter and Elsie's encounter with Hans Beckert (Peter Lorre), the murderer. There is minimal dialogue; the scene mostly depends on images and movement. Towards the end, what began as parallel editing loses its rhythm and decomposes into a collage of abstract and metaphorical images coupled with complete silence.

This shift starts with the camera showing Elsie's mother from inside her flat, walking out towards the staircase. The next shot is an overview of the staircase from her point of view and we hear her call out her daughter's name for the first time. She

comes into the apartment and looks up; her look is reciprocated with the shot of the clock on the wall. Subsequently, we see her walking toward the window and opening it in an impulsive and anxious reaction to the voice of a street vendor from outside; she bends down and calls out for Elsie again. To our surprise, instead of a shot of the street, there is the same shot of the staircase once more, followed by a shot of what appears to be a laundry room; the camera is fixed and there is hardly any movement in the images, which are accompanied by the mother's repeated calls. The next three shots similarly stay on the screen for about five seconds each, but this time the sound



**Figure 5.1** Ball on the grass; **Figure 5.2** Balloon caught in wires

is completely removed. We see Elsie's empty chair by the table and the untouched lunch prepared by her mother; then some grass and bushes, which is presumably a part of a larger field, out of which Elsie's ball rolls; then an electric pole against the sky and her balloon caught between its wires, fluttering (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). The sequence ends with a fade-out to black.

These concluding shots carry a common feature: they all lack Elsie. The first two shots (of the staircase and the laundry room) refer to the locations in which her mother searches for her and probably where she usually is; the third (of the table) shows where she is supposed to be at this time of the day, and, finally, the last two point to where she is (or where she was just before she died). Except for their shared purpose to signify Elsie's past and present whereabouts, these ambiguous shots are spatially, temporally and causally disconnected from each other. Moreover, they hold no spatial, temporal or causal specificity individually; this sequence takes place in the beginning of the film and we have almost no associations with the images that we see. These final five shots last about half a minute in total, though they convey the passing of a much longer period of time. Similarly, although the images are few, static and what they contain is minimal, they construct a significant part of the narrative. The first part of this sequence tells us how Elsie has gone missing; the second part, which begins when the parallel cutting ends, suggests how and where people looked for her and how she was taken out of the city and murdered. The disintegration of the parallel cutting not only hints at the murder and suggests an ending as a visual metaphor, it also reveals the inevitable: Elsie is no longer alive to be included in the frame and there is no movement or incident on her side. In the end, the camera captures her belongings with which the characters (and we) remember and imagine her.

Such a fragmented usage is incorporated within the continuity of the narrative; as Anton Kaes writes: 'The cross-cutting emphasises the spatial separation between mother and child' (Kaes 2001: 27); 'inanimate objects stand in for an absent – and violently silenced – person' (13) and 'sound affirms presence and life [whereas] silence connotes absence and death' (13). In fact, there are stylistically similar scenes

throughout the film, which also develop the narrative. When the Mafia finds the murderer in the business complex and leaves before the police arrive, we see a montage of frames in silence depicting details such as the store rooms where they find him, the unconscious and hand-tied watchmen and the hole they opened in the floor. A similar set of shots is repeated with the voice-over of the police officer finding out about this incident. The film is designed in such a way, that the images in these scenes seem to have more authority than the main story; at such times, the camera seems quite independent yet in control of situations, people and objects.<sup>21</sup> Things that are not mentioned in the dialogue or through the characters' actions and interactions seem to be revealed through the silent images. Fragments, abstractions and residues are indicative of an incident, a character, an object or an emotion. Such a use is not distracting; it helps us understand the narrative. Anton Kaes writes

[the film] presents an accumulation of autonomous scenes held together not by an overt cause-and-effect logic, but by the principle of illustration and seriality [that] disregard the unity of time and place. [These scenes] do not follow a narratively bound chronology, but the spatial expanse of fragmentary information which corresponds to an explosion of viewpoints. (2001: 35-36)

In this sense, it is not surprising that 'Lang called this film a documentary' (Kaes 2001: 9). These collections of several viewpoints are not only due to seriality, but also to the camerawork and the pictorial composition in the shots.<sup>22</sup> As Horst Lange argues, the film 'achieves its emotional effect by presenting the murderous threat in the "cold" film language of documentaries' (2009: 170) and it 'does not really take sides, for each political paradigm has a flawed relation to the people' (182). By employing these spatially, temporally and causally disconnected shots in its narrative, the film underlines the themes of surveillance and social control in the city and investigates 'how what it means to be human has been transformed by social and economic modernity' (Lange 2009: 170-171). The omniscience of the gaze of the

camera, which is above the power of the criminals or the police, is represented through this fragmented form. It defies any continuity in time, space or causality.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, fragmentation draws attention to the missing links as well as the independent meaning of each shot. However, it may not always misdirect the audience from the story; on the contrary, it may provide clues to the story's construction. The anxiety and uneasiness one may feel at first sight is due to the need to complete and understand things, something not immediately possible with a series of incoherent images. Nevertheless, when these unique discontinuous scenes are evaluated within the whole narrative, the sense of discontinuity they produce ceases to prevail.

*Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg, 1971) similarly uses a montage sequence that is individually detached from the rest of the film and which comprises images that loosely connect to one another. The opening sequence presents moments from an ordinary day in the lives of the family portrayed in the film and it introduces the primary themes such as communication, conformity, civilisation and survival.

*Walkabout's* main narrative actually begins in the next scene: the father (John Meillon) takes his children (Jenny Agutter and Luc Roeg) to have a picnic in the vast desert; instead he attempts to shoot his son and then kills himself. The journey of the two abandoned children and their encounter with the Aborigine boy (David Gulpilil) start here. Therefore, the opening sequence not only has a discontinuous form within itself, but it is also isolated from the rest of the story. These images belong only here and they are never fully explained or linked to anything else later in the movie.

The film starts with the credits running over a short series of close-up shots showing details of rough and uneven surfaces of brown desert rocks. The last close-up is different; it shows the smooth and orderly bricks of a wall of the same colour.





**Figure 5.3** Pan from brick wall to the street in the opening scene

The camera then pans to the right to reveal a long-shot of a busy street in the city (Figure 5.3), after which the montage of distinct images starts running: close-ups of feet and legs; people crossing the street to go to work; glass-windowed facades of modern buildings. These shots stay on the screen no longer than a few seconds. In between the rhythmic cuts of these images, the female protagonist is among students doing pronunciation exercises in a classroom, her brother is in school uniform, walking among the crowds on the streets and in the school garden, and her father is getting out of a black car presumably to go to work. The characters seem insignificant as the content is overwhelmed by the photographed details of modern life and its various mechanised aspects: the systematic march of the soldiers passing by, the punctuality of the traffic, the uniformity of school children and people going to work. Halfway through the sequence, we see the same pan to the right of the frame from behind the brick wall. This time the camera reveals the desert, suggesting its contrasting proximity to the city; they are tangential yet separate. In the following part, we see the father and the children separately making their way back home. The boy passes through a dense forest; the girl climbs the road towards their house with the view of the Sydney Harbour in the background and the father is framed looking up at the tall buildings, dwarfed by their size. At home, the mother is preparing food, the

children swim in the pool and the father enjoys the view of the sea from the balcony. The montage sequence ends with the third image of the brick wall; once again, the camera pans towards the right to reveal the desert, only this time there is also a car at the right side of the frame. The opening sequence's highly fragmented form is enhanced with the frequent use of the non-diegetic sound of an Aboriginal instrument that matches the rhythm of the movement in the images and the cuts in between them. This monotone sound is interrupted with blurred radio transmissions, traffic noise and the repetitive sound of the students' vocal exercises.

The images in this sequence are not and never become part of a longer scene or shot, but they allude to the rest of the film in obvious ways; for instance, the walk of the people in the crowded modern city contrasts with the long journey in the emptiness and the harshness of the desert in the following scenes. Similarly, the children's proper clothes, obsession with listening to the radio and correct use of language, all of which remind us of the civilised life, seem pointless in the desert. Except for a few instances as abrupt inserts, the film does not return to the images in the opening sequence yet they leave a strong impression of life back in Sydney. Chuck Kleinhans writes that 'usually his contrasts have a thematic purpose [and] Roeg revels in such antitheses: city/country, civilization/wilderness, label/tree, unnatural/natural' (1974). In effect, the film's themes are briefly introduced in the opening sequence before being further developed throughout.

The contrast between food for pleasure and food for survival, for instance, is a recurring theme throughout the film and it sets forth many questions about the natural harmony between animals and people. In the montage sequence, we see a shop sign promoting 'Kangaroo Meat'; next is a zoom-out from a close-up of a lump of minced meat, a portion of which is taken by a butcher to be wrapped; next a chicken is put on

a scale to be weighed. Then, there is an abrupt cut to birds flying in the forest where the little boy is walking.<sup>24</sup> The theme of food is further repeated in the house where we hear on the radio in the kitchen the strange recipe of eating the Ortolan (a tiny bird): ‘captured alive, force-fed, then drowned in Armagnac’. Later in the film, when the Aborigine hunts down an animal and prepares it for cooking, a brief shot of the chicken from the opening sequence is inserted in the scene. This insert obviously prepares us to compare the two situations. The inspecificity and discreteness of the shot is not confusing; on the contrary, it is meaningful in the film’s narrative.

The references to the first sequence of images are not directed or controlled; John Izod writes, ‘scattered fragmentary scenes [...] cannot gather back into a unity of meaning by juxtaposing [them] with the next shot [because] the next piece in each section of the puzzle will be found some way on through the film’ (Izod 1992: 59). However, the scarcity of information about life in the city does not cause gaps in the narrative because our knowledge and familiarity with that life offers us the capacity to fill in the blanks. We find it easy to make connections to the opening sequence whereas, most of the time, we do not understand the Aborigine’s actions in the rest of the film. Language is one barrier, but his movements, expressions and reactions are even more puzzling. We are not able to comprehend simple common attitudes; neither his long dance towards the end of the movie nor his suicide have a clear meaning for us, though his images dominate most of the scenes in detail. The dance can be interpreted in various ways, as a sign of appreciation, farewell, sadness or love; his final posture on the tree with his hand on the branches is not clearly decipherable as suicide. If communication is a predominant theme that the film is exploring, then the opening sequence, by its form and content, is a criticism of the lack of communication between civilisation and nature as well as a representation of how

regulated human behaviour is when it is remote from a natural environment. Furthermore, this opening's detachment from the rest of the movie does not make it an excessive material in the narrative; conversely, we can make more meaning out of these disconnected images than we do from the rest of the film. In this sense, it would be misleading to call 'some of the intrusions into the narrative [...] independent scenes' (Izod 1992: 59) or argue that 'Roeg repeatedly breaks story continuity with abrupt zooms and other camera pyrotechnics' (Lanza 1989: 97) because such a form adds meaning to the narrative rather than disrupting it. Instead of providing a complete storyline, *Walkabout* leaves many questions unanswered in the narrative, such as why the father took the children to the desert in the first place and killed himself before abandoning them; however, the result is not discontinuity because the style in the film creates gaps, questions and contradictions that relate to some of the major themes in the film.

The fragmented scenes in both *M* and *Walkabout* are relevant to the stories. There is discontinuity within the scenes discussed, but they do not break the linear narratives. They function more as a symbolic guide for the films without a correct or complete interpretation. Rather than taking the story forward, they visualise and introduce themes and moods. Another film that revolves around similar themes of alienation and dislocation in modern societies and also utilises fragmented scenes as subjects in its story is *Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders, 1987). This film shows images from two angels' viewpoints as they search for what it means to be a human being in the world by observing people in the city and reading their minds. The narrative is mostly built on the interior monologues of both the angels and the people they observe. Frequently, as the camera pans to show a group of people going about their usual business, whether walking on the streets or studying in the library, we hear

a mixture of overlapping voices whose origin and direction are, at times, impossible to specify. These are flows of thoughts in the form of loosely connected words and phrases instead of complete and coherent sentences. The camera sometimes follows the angels' routes and shows what they are looking at; or sometimes we see a montage of images loosely or directly related to the articulated strands of thoughts in the sound track. The lines in the voice-over narration from 'Song of Childhood', a poem by co-scriptwriter Peter Handke, form an apparent recurring theme, which emphasises the dominance of the voice-over. There is no strong link between the scenes in terms of causality in the narrative; they connect via visual imagery accompanied by the sound. The relationship between image and sound is discussed by some writers as paralleling the theme of perception in the film: 'angels and humans alike feel the limits of both word and image and thus seek fuller means of perception' (Caldwell and Rea 1991: 50); '[the film] can be understood as [an] investigation of the perceptual field, specifically of the human senses' (Oksiloff 1996: 32). This investigation of perception is realized through the exploration of differences in memory, experience and knowledge between human beings and angels. In other words, the film's focus is subjectivity and especially the uniqueness of individual experience as opposed to the all-seeing eyes and all-knowing memories of the angels. Cesare Cesarino argues that in the film, 'fragmentation itself is the enabling condition of representation' – which is due to the exploration of subjectivity – and 'the film represents an impossibility of representation' (1990: 179). *Wings of Desire* ends its investigation by showing the impossibility of representing subjectivity.

The film's subject is manifested best through the use of this style. The movement in the narrative of this film is achieved through the structure of the words – most of which are taken from poetry – rather than temporal, spatial or causal links

between the shots. The continuity is primarily constructed through the flow of voices; without sound, the film would lose much of its narrative. The story of the angels moves forward in a continuous manner, but it remains off-centre. The film's main focus is the images and sounds; whether they turn into a meaningful and complete story is secondary. The narrative contains fragments of images, characters and incidents rather than having a strictly composed beginning, middle and ending. There is harmony as well as friction between image and sound; the angels' story seems random, ordinary and without much weight.

The recurring use of montage sequences in the film causes some characters, settings and incidents to be underdeveloped. The film opens with such a sequence: there is a shot of the clouds followed by a close-up of an eye and then a shot of the city from above. Next, we see an angel, Cassiel (Otto Sander) on top of a building, looking down. The following shots have a slightly causal order: a couple of children looking up from inside a car as if they have noticed the angel; a mother cycling with her baby at the back of her bike; an airplane cabin in which we are briefly introduced to the film star Peter Falk and one of the angels, Damiel (Bruno Ganz), who is observing the passengers. Then, the camera starts descending from above; there is a shot of a radio tower, the clouds and bird-eye views of the city. Through the windows, the camera smoothly enters into buildings to present instances from lives of the residents. There are shots of a mother and a child watching television, a lonely woman looking blankly at the newly painted walls and a man who presumably comes into his late mother's flat to tidy up what she left behind. All these disconnected moments are accompanied by the character's interior monologues. In this opening sequence that lasts about ten minutes, we are not given clues about what this descent from the sky means. When the two angels are talking in a car in the next scene, we

infer that the previous images belonged to their subjective viewpoints and the film continues to portray the angels' observations accordingly.

A comparable sequence takes place right after Cassiel witnesses a young man commit suicide by jumping off the roof of a building. As he tries to imitate the man, presumably to understand what it feels like to die, we see a series of fast-forwarded shots. Apart from their speed, they employ the same floating camera movement that seems to observe and search for something, which is the mark of the angels' viewpoint throughout the film. However, because of the speed and the choice of disconnected shots, the effect of this sequence is more intense and puzzling. During its speedy search, the camera first stops on a homeless person on the street; then on a map in the underground followed by a long shot of a shop window (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). The next shot is of two people arguing inside a house where the woman, thrown by the man onto the bed, says, 'Leave me alone, you swine'. Immediately afterwards



**Figures 5.4 and 5.5** Shots from the sequence after the suicide

we see a small boy outside, crying ‘Mother, Mother’. Although the child’s response seems like a protest against the violence imposed upon the woman, the two shots are spatially separate. The sequence gets more fragmented as we skip to images of bombs falling off airplanes, buildings on fire and people trying to run away. These are seemingly taken from real footage of World War II and contrastingly edited with shots of flapping wings of an angel. The sequence ends abruptly with a zoom into a random man, collapsed right in front of a phone booth with the phone in his hand. We intermittently see Cassiel’s face in this sequence; he looks off-screen and the shots seem to correspond to his look, which I understand to be his search for a motive behind the wish to die.

*Wings of Desire* tells the story of people in the city through distinct moments and images accompanied by a poetic narration. The film’s style is not new for 1987; examples from Italian neorealism or the French New Wave as well as New Hollywood have explored such a style.<sup>25</sup> The film’s narrative is made up of the montage sequences and the incoherency of sound and image rather than the substantial details of the angels’ story. Why Damiel decided to become human or whether he will meet the woman he fell in love with are questions that remain secondary to the abundance of independent sound and image. What Wenders does in *Wings of Desire* may be ‘the intermixing of narrative and non-narrative film styles’ (Wolfson 2003: 133), but this non-narrative style dissolves into the ongoing story. Some images or words remain unexplained or indecipherable without breaking the continuity of the film. Similarly, in the voice-over narration, the sentences do not always make up a coherent meaning, yet its flowing form is rarely interrupted. As Oksiloff observes, ‘sound functions to illuminate the fluidity of visual spaces in penetrating through walls and external forms’ (1996: 33). The repeating combination



of the fragmented images and flowing sound forms the continuity in the film's narrative. Roger Cook writes, 'the spectator must give in, not to pre-packaged cinematic narrative of the type Wenders abhors but rather to the flow itself [and] let the words flow past, content with picking up those lyrical fragments that strike up a meaningful chord (1991: 39). Although Cook finds 'texts within the flow of voice-over [...] arbitrary', they are 'fragments of an ever-expanding body of knowledge that overwhelms the individual and thwarts attempts to find a larger meaning in our existence (39). The flow of the narrative is the viewpoint of the angels, and the main subject of the film; they have an excessive amount of accumulated knowledge, experience and memory that is greater than human consciousness. Fragmentation is the form of the subject of the film; what appears to be non-narrative or non-fiction is narrative and fiction.

*M*, *Walkabout* and *Wings of Desire* are obviously made by different filmmakers in different countries and at different times. Needless to say, the contexts get reflected in the films and the fragmentations represent various things. Nevertheless, the functions of these fragmentations are not merely symbolic but also thematic. Another film that similarly turns discontinuity into content is *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974). The story's main subject is a short scene from its opening, which is decomposed and used repeatedly as an element of suspense and curiosity in the narrative. *The Conversation* uses discontinuity in a manner comparable to the contemporary cases examined in the previous chapters. Similar to *Memento*, *Eternal Sunshine* or *Caché*, this film deconstructs its own stylistic and thematic elements.

The film is about a professional wiretapper, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), who has moved to San Francisco from New York after an assignment he was given there

resulted in the murder of a family. His tangential involvement in this incident strictly contradicts his beliefs; Harry is a practising Christian who frequently visits church to make confessions and he wants to stay away from and prevent any similar happenings. The film opens with an extreme long shot of Union Square from high above and the camera zooms in very slowly to the people walking there. The first person we catch a glimpse of is Harry Caul; as he walks out of the frame, the camera stays with a couple whom he has just passed. In the following shots the couple is shown as a target, being closely watched from various high angles. The camera shifts again to the ground level but passers-by randomly block the man and the woman. Meanwhile we hear their conversation; it is almost inaudible and largely distorted not only because of the noise of the band playing and the crowds talking in the Square but also because of the intentional sound editing for this scene. The conversation is in the form of raw materials from various microphones and we hear it as it is recorded onto the tapes that Harry is going to work on. Therefore, the sound does not realistically match the image.

Harry's client is interested in a copy of this conversation and his work entails putting the most comprehensible aural elements from the three microphone recordings together into one smoothly flowing piece. The conversation seems ordinary although the couple suspect that they are being spied upon. Harry does not know the reason why his client wants this tape, but his past experience makes him suspect the intentions behind the job. As the film progresses, the statement he makes to his colleague in the beginning, 'I don't care what they're talking about, all I want is a nice recording' becomes increasingly untrue. Except for their decision on a time and place to meet, the conversation contains the lovers' affectionate and cautious yet insignificant dialogue. As Harry listens to parts of the conversation over and over

again, its insignificance and unspecificity expands, making him more curious about why it got recorded in the first place. The sentence 'He'd kill us if he got the chance' gives him a reason to believe these two people are going to be victims of a crime. His interest shifts from the recording's form to its content; the clarity and audibility of the conversation are less important than what it really means.

The film alternately utilises the fragmented aural pieces that Harry works on and their visual counterparts from the opening scene. The major element that drives the film's narrative forward is these fragments that its protagonist is trying to combine. Harry's job consists of making the conversation into a linear and comprehensible stream of sentences but his curiosity leads him also to try to learn why it was recorded. To do this, Harry needs to locate the characters and the dialogue in a larger frame of relationships. What is seemingly a naïve conversation between lovers makes Harry assume that he is involved in turning the innocent into victims once again. However, to understand this, Harry needs to put the fragments in order. When the full story is connected with the scene, it appears that the real murderers are the couple. Indeed, as Dennis Turner argues, 'it could be argued that what we are seeing is only what he imagines in his guilty paranoia [and his] disintegrating consciousness' (1985: 8). In this sense, the film is regarded as being 'open-ended' (1985: 4) and 'challenge[s] our genre expectations' (Gray 1999: 129).<sup>26</sup>

The film's form presents us with an abundance of recurring sentences from the conversation and shots from the opening scene. However, the main story of the film is not about the couple; it is about Harry's confrontation with the past and his paranoia.<sup>27</sup> The conversation is a tool for suspense that brings out details about Harry's character. It is an inquiry into his faith and the contradiction he lives between what he does and what he believes in. The film makes use of the fragmented nature

of the recorded conversation to point at the difficulty Harry has in controlling the situation and to force him to question his own past. *The Conversation* does not provide answers as to who exactly the couple were, why they were together, what they did; the extent of knowledge that the victim had of their relationship and these details are irrelevant. The film incorporates this isolated scene and conversation in fragments into its narrative as an element of causality. Brenda Austin-Smith argues that 'Harry acts as a film editor, marrying image track to sound track to produce a coherent story. And like the film viewer, Harry fills in narrative gaps and ambiguities, supplementing what is visible and audible with what he believes to be the truth' (2001). In this sense, *The Conversation* simultaneously explores filmmaking.<sup>28</sup> These fragments are obviously a part of the narrative as well as the style; they belong to a subpart of the story, which is never fully explained. In the end, Harry's meticulous profession of assembling the missing pieces reverses into tearing things apart, as he demolishes his apartment while looking for a wiretapping device. The content of the conversation was never significant; it was the attempt to put the fragments in order that lead to the deconstruction of his own past. Therefore, *The Conversation* uses a fragmented scene as the main suspense element in the story; the content of the scene does not have much meaning in the narrative, but its fragmented form is integrated into the story in such a way that it becomes a model for Harry's self-analysis.

### ***The Passion of Joan of Arc: A case that defies classical continuity***

The films discussed so far contain unique discontinuous scenes that explain some of the main themes and motives in the stories. My last example is quite extraordinary as it does not involve fragmentation in the form of montage sequences

and disconnected shots. Yet, I find this example significant in terms of violating some of the basic principles of classical continuity, which is the reason it should be included in this discussion. The discontinuous editing and framing in Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) distort our understanding of space, time and causality, but the question this analysis explores is whether this discontinuity can simultaneously contribute to our construction of a narrative. The film is about the trial of Joan of Arc by priests and judges before her execution. Dreyer famously makes minimal use of medium shots and long shots; the entire anecdote is told mainly with close-ups.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the film is seemingly composed of a sequence of isolated images. We see faces in frames, but rarely complete human figures; their spatial positions in relation to one another remain ambiguous. Details of faces, especially of Joan's (Maria Falconetti's), work as stylistic tools to set up the scene. In other words, facial expressions, particularly the movements of the eyes, are the primary means to establish and generate the spatial and causal relationships between the different characters.

The use of close-ups is a part of the film's narrative as much as of its style. Joan's face dominates most of the film; this use does not simply emphasise the sorrow and pain of the protagonist, but it also functions as a metaphor in the narrative. Joan is isolated, trapped, judged and put on display; she is alone against others at all times. The close-up visually corresponds to this situation separating her from the angry crowd of priests and judges. Furthermore, it puts us in a position similar to that of her spectators because most of the time we look only at her. Being on the side of the interrogators but not having the ability to interfere makes us vulnerable, and feel sympathetic to Joan. Dreyer claimed that such was the role of these close-ups: 'to move the viewers so that they would feel in their own flesh the suffering endured by

Joan' (Quoted in O'Brien 1996: 21). For him, the close-up was 'the place where film could develop as a unique art form, able to move in close and concentrate attention on the human being in a way that the stage could never do' (Quoted in Scalia 2004: 182). In that sense, evaluating each individual shot on its own is as important as how one responds to the way they link to each other. According to Richard Rowland, the close-ups are 'not truly static; there is constant development [...] each fragment of a gesture is meaningful and revealing' (1950: 54). 'We become aware of a complexity and depth in Joan [...] entirely through watching her face' (56). This stylistic choice turns us into inept and silent spectators of the trial and helps us understand Joan's situation; it is significant in explaining and reinforcing Joan's solitude in martyrdom as well as setting a point of view to present the injustice employed towards her. The close-up is exploited in the film as much as Joan is exploited in the story.

Another alternative function of the close-ups is to control spatial and causal connections between shots. In continuity editing, the main purpose of the eye-match is to maintain a realistic sense of space in the relationship between shots; the characters' looks do not contradict the sense of space established between people and/or objects. The off-screen look of a character is consequently matched with the object or another person's look in the next shot. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* utilises eye-matches in the same way: we infer whom Joan is looking at and, to a certain extent, what she might be thinking, according to the direction in which she is looking.<sup>30</sup> However, the rarity of establishing shots complicates our attempts to visualise the space. The close-ups compress, flatten and distort the space around Joan; therefore, they transform the function of a conventional eye-match. The purpose of the missing establishing shots is sustained through the use of the detailed expressions and looks. The character looks off-screen in one direction but the next

shot is not always a reverse shot; furthermore, the camera never frames the crowd together in the trial room. We have to complete the missing pieces of the space by scrutinising the characters' faces. Bordwell uses words such as 'strangeness', 'gaps', 'dislocations', 'estranging features' and 'distortion' when referring to the editing in the film. (1981: 66). He argues that the film frequently disorients us spatially and denies the relationship between narrative logic and cinematic space, giving examples from a scene where 'the space is impossible' (77) because there are shifts in eye-line matches. Furthermore, he writes: 'The stylistic dynamism of the film springs from its discontinuities; the viewer must deal with problems of relating cinematic space to narrative logic' (80-81). In other words, spatial inconsistency and confusion is something that makes up the style and is necessary in reflecting the mood. However, even though some of the reciprocating shots are missing and the space is constructed with disconnected shots, this discontinuity functions as an element of continuity in the narrative. There may not be unity of space, but it does not obstruct our understanding of the narrative.<sup>31</sup> Dreyer's concern is with Jean's image in each individual frame more than with a continuous and smooth flow between shots. His use of décor and framing reinforces this concern. The camera's position at very low angles produces oblique and unfamiliar planes; we see the world from an oddly adjusted point of view. This is especially apparent in the shots that frame doorways; as people enter through them, the doors seem to be slanted and the people seem to be standing tilted to the side. Added to the limitation of space that the close-ups create are the distorted planes that these angles generate. However, the fact that this is 'an indeterminate space' (O'Brien 1996: 19) does not make us demand more information. Bordwell writes that 'the neutral white background often becomes the only continuity factor across the cut' (1981: 78) and this continuity is enough to construct the relationship

between the narrative logic and the cinematic space that he argues the film rejects (66).

The meaning and continuity of the narrative in *Joan of Arc* are formed in each image as well as their order in a sequence. The focus of the narrative is not how and why Joan ended up in the trial; it is the relationship between Joan and her interrogators. The verdict is made before the trial starts and it is slowly imposed on Joan. The narrative of the film is less about the linearity of the trial – where and when Joan was caught or who took which side – and more about the details of Joan's suffering, her helplessness against the men and the sharp opposition between the two. The spatial and causal elements of the narrative in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* are completed with the close-ups and our responses to them. Any gaps produced with the use of close-ups function as part of the continuity.

## **Conclusion**

This supplementary chapter has focused on additional examples that could not be easily included in the main chapters were organised around some of the most obvious cases of discontinuity. Needless to say, there could be many other additional examples and chapters, but including all of them in the thesis is an impossible task. The films in the first section of the chapter, *L'Âge d'or*, 2001 and *Citizen Kane*, are well-known examples of discontinuity and they exemplify the co-dependent relationship of avant-garde and narrative cinema. The final section concentrates on one example, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, which conspicuously violates the principles of classical continuity. The remaining set of films is an assorted selection, all of which contain discontinuous scenes. Altogether, the chapter considers numerous



films from different genres, periods, filmmakers and contexts under the overarching concept of discontinuity.

The primary purpose of this group of short film analyses is to demonstrate the different forms and functions that discontinuity can take in film style and narrative. Thus, the effect of the episodic, non-linear structures of *L'Âge d'or*, 2001 and *Citizen Kane* are discussed in relation to the films' main themes and subjects. The films that use discontinuous sequences are similarly evaluated with respect to the significance of these sequences in terms of explaining and emphasising some of the films' themes. The second purpose of grouping these film analyses together is to demonstrate how discontinuity can be used as a critical concept to analyse films. The examples in the chapter (and throughout the thesis) support the argument that the films can be interpreted primarily with references to the uses of discontinuities in their styles and narratives even when there is an overall continuity. The inclusion of the analysis of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is significant because this is a film that is viewed as a case that does not adhere to classical continuity. In other words, *Joan* has been an example to demonstrate the outcomes of a situation in which there is a lack of continuity. As discussed in the introductory chapters of the thesis, one of the purposes of studying discontinuity is to think of it as a concept on its own, rather than in opposition with continuity. Instead of looking at *Joan of Arc* through something that the film does not intend to establish, the analysis in this chapter concentrates on what the film has achieved, thus, it evaluates the uses of discontinuity and how they affect our understanding and appreciation of the film.

Overall, the chapter finalises my discussion of discontinuity by displaying how this concept can be put to practice in film analyses and how it can be useful for interpreting films. Through an array of short but diverse examples the chapter

demonstrates how discontinuities function, in what forms they are used and what they contribute to film's stories.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Avant-garde may be used to indicate many different anti-mainstream and experimental works, but here I refer to the origins of the movement; e.g. the 1920s-30s modernist avant-garde.

<sup>2</sup> For the mutually influential relationship between mainstream/classical cinema and avant-garde/experimental movements, and definitions of modern and avant-garde in cinema, see Kovács (2007: 7-32). Rees (2008) also refers to the avant-garde's influences on mainstream filmmaking.

<sup>3</sup> Pruitt writes that 'Buñuel was known to be an admirer of Keaton's work' and both *Sherlock Jr.* and *Un Chien Andalou* 'contain "dream doubles" of the central protagonist' (2006: 140).

<sup>4</sup> Comparing the discontinuity in these two films, Sitney argues that 'In all likelihood Deren and Hammid were more conscious of the influence, however indirect, of Orson Welles's then recent *Citizen Kane* with its regular shifts of perspective, than of *Un Chien Andalou* (1979: 15).

<sup>5</sup> For a comparison of Dalí's design and Hitchcock's realisation, see Gould (1976: 55-58).

Dalí also collaborated with Walt Disney in 1946 for an animated short called *Destino*, released by The Walt Disney Company in 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew writes 'The Surrealists, just like Amélie, used to scan the movie screen, hunting for details unseen even by the director' (2004: 35). He also draws attention to the way anamorphic format is used in *Amélie* to 'encourage miracles of the image' (35).

<sup>7</sup> Carroll writes about the relationship between avant-garde and mainstream and gives examples born out of a union of these two modes. He places *Memento*, 'in the lineage of this tendency [...] in popular cinema, a tradition that seeks to assimilate avant-garde developments into the mainstream' (2009: 133).

<sup>8</sup> 'This material is actual scientific footage, completely unretouched and unedited by Buñuel' (Gould 1976: 70).

<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the film can be compared to the genre-hopping films discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>10</sup> *L'Âge d'or* 'unfolded dialectically [and] oscillate[d] between passion and action, reverie and outburst, desire and disgust' because 'it had two distinct creative sources, Dalí and Buñuel' (Andrew 2006: 114).

<sup>11</sup> 'The theme of the film is frustration. The form of the film mirrors its theme' (Hammond 1997: 57). '[S]ubversive love and its frustrations in the story is matched by the subversion of form which frustrates our consumption of the film' (Short 2003: 126).

<sup>12</sup> 'Only by setting the avant-garde within the broad context of cultural politics and the consciousness industry – and only by seeing the chances to use the ruptures within the system – can we obtain a full understanding of the avant-garde' (Schulte-Sasse 2009: xxx). 'In general, "avant-garde" is used to designate politically conscious, antibourgeois, activist art movements' (Kovács 2007: 14). Surrealism developed not only as an art movement but also as a political thought. In the 'Manifesto of Surrealism', Breton attacks logic as a construct imposed by the dominant political and economic system.

<sup>13</sup> See Grant (2006: 80); Mainar (1999: 156); Patterson (2004: 444, 469); Sperb (2006: 83).

<sup>14</sup> Kubrick calls *2001* a 'mythological documentary' and a 'controlled dream' (Patterson 2004: 444).

<sup>15</sup> Daniels argues '*2001* deliberately frustrated the narrative demands of its audience to demonstrate the failure' of the scientists 'to realise the full implications of their discovery' (1970/71: 31) and that 'Kubrick makes his spectacle his subject' (33). Mainar writes '*2001* breaks the distinction between traditional narrative and spectacle: the brilliant nature of the visual spectacle becomes the real content of the text' (1999: 151).

<sup>16</sup> The popularity of such a style among the young audience at the time is not surprising. Palmer draws attention to this 'counterculture' by making references to Kael's criticism and writes how 'the film became a cult attraction, recreational drug use in the auditorium was commonly reported' (2006: 14).

<sup>17</sup> Daniels points to the resemblance to symphony 'beyond the film's four-part structure' and argues some parts are 'filmic equivalents of sonata-allegro form and motivic development in symphonic music' (1970/71: 29). Kubrick refers to 'a Beethoven symphony' when explaining how he 'intended the film to be an intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner level of

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consciousness, just as music does' (Patterson 2004: 469). Through detailed musical analyses of *2001*, Patterson writes about how critics condemned the film for exploiting music (2004: 446-447).

<sup>18</sup> Wollen refers to 'the flashback structure' as the film's 'most obvious feature' (1982: 55); Cook writes 'the formal organization of [the film] is extraordinary' (1981: 352); Naremore refers to the 'violent overlappings and baroque contrasts [...] on the visual level' (2004: 134).

<sup>19</sup> One example is the opening scene in *Persona*.

<sup>20</sup> Dimendberg writes about the compositional similarities of some shots in the film with the aesthetics of Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko (1997: 72). Kaes refers to the tradition of New Objectivity (1993: 108-109) and Bauhaus photographers (2001: 13) in discussing the shots from elevated angles.

<sup>21</sup> Kaes argues that it looks 'as if Lang, coming from silent film, would not trust words alone' (2001: 36).

<sup>22</sup> Eisner writes about the documentary element in the film and explains how some elements in the story such as 'the beggars' exchange [...] are based on fact' (1977: 114).

<sup>23</sup> This fragmentation is in fact further emphasised with the contrast between image and sound as the 'effect of hearing a sound before its source is revealed visually will be repeated throughout the film' (Herzog 2009: 292). Herzog argues that this contrast is reflected in the cross cutting of different investigations: the police will look for visual clues and the beggars will depend on aural ones (294-303).

<sup>24</sup> According to Salwolke, 'In their presentation, these sequences resemble the theory of montage that Eisenstein first put forth' (1993: 27). Kleinhans also likens this use to Eisensteinian montage, but he argues that 'for Roeg juxtaposition is basic' and he does not succeed in 'establishing a synthesis of a higher order than the individual shots' (1974). I agree with Kleinhans about the lack of synthesis; furthermore, Roeg does not always use montage to contrast things, as in the opening sequence where we get a sense of rhythm and developing tension more than the juxtaposition of the city and the desert.

<sup>25</sup> *Germania anno zero* (Roberto Rosellini, 1948), *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962) and *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), for instance, have specific moments in which solely the distinct images are emphasised by sound or silence.

<sup>26</sup> Many writers have tried to explain this style with the film's references to past films such as Antonioni's *Blow Up*. Carroll calls this 'allusion' and claims that it is a characteristic of many new Hollywood directors (1982). See Turner (1985) and Braudy (1986) for the influence of earlier films.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to recall the incidents during this period such as Kennedy's assassination and the Watergate scandal. For a social background analysis see Gray (1999).

<sup>28</sup> According to Coppola, the subject of *The Conversation* is the technology of sound reproduction (Turner 1985: 5). Braudy also writes Harry 'is a figure of director' (1986: 22) and his professionalism turn into his failure.

<sup>29</sup> The original print was burned and no copy of the film was available until 1981 when it was found in a psychiatric hospital in Norway. The restorers believe the version we see today is very close to Dreyer's original.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed examination of how the eye-match is used in the film see Bordwell (1981: 66-92). He first explains the norms of continuity editing and shows how Dreyer sometimes deviates from this use and how at other times adopts it. According to him, this is an inconsistency that makes it hard for us to construct a coherent narrative space. Bordwell's method of analysing the film shot by shot is useful, even if contrasting the shots with continuity editing limits and misinterprets what the film uniquely does with its style.

<sup>31</sup> Dreyer 'communicate[s] visually the tensions of Joan's inner and outward struggle – the face, alternating low angle/high angle camera positions, and the tight framing that leaves no wasted space in the *mise en scène*' (Scalia 2004: 184). Such a style 'could be understood as a commitment to an exploration of an apocalyptic logic; [...] the unconventional moments in the opening sequence [...] foreshadow the apocalyptic collapse that will occur by the film's conclusion' (Redmon 2006: 188-189).

*From here it will occur to someone to ask, Then what is a movie a recording of?; to which the answer is apt to be, Nothing.*

– Stanley Cavell (1979: 182)

## CONCLUSION

### Final Remarks on Discontinuity in Narrative Cinema

The idea behind this research emerged from an interest in what appeared to be an increase in the number of contemporary films displaying a discontinuous style. These films seemingly change the film-watching experience as they require close attention to detail and sometimes multiple viewings in order to follow and understand their narratives fully. They seem to construct and manipulate time, space and causality differently through their conspicuous stylistic choices. An abrupt edit could obscure the content of a scene or the use of a hand-held camera by a character in the film could confuse the point of view in the story. These films and the growing critical literature on them prompted me to examine their style, aspects of which several film critics have already outlined. As explained in the introduction, they have been discussed as puzzle films, database narratives or mind-game films. What I realised is that all these films can best be described with a common keyword: discontinuity. Furthermore, discontinuity is neither limited to contemporary cinema nor exclusive to one genre or period. This thesis categorised and evaluated a variety of examples under the overarching concept of discontinuity while attempting to think through a more thorough definition of it. Using detailed film analyses, I have assessed discontinuity as a stylistic choice and a storytelling tool in films, exploring the different forms and functions it assumes. Moreover, I have asked whether discontinuity was fruitful as a critical concept in studying and interpreting films.

Finally, these examinations have led me to rethink the nature of cinema and the meanings of film style and narrative.

A substantial part of this research was devoted to studying individual films. The thesis aimed to evaluate the diverse effects of what we see on the screen. This method was used as a way to respond to the varying questions that discontinuity films present in terms of alternative modes of style and storytelling. Each interpretation and analysis was an argument in and of itself, building up the discussion of discontinuity in cinema, which enabled me to ask larger questions about the history, ontology and aesthetics of film. Reviewing and thinking about individual films in detail brought about some unexpected discoveries. Studying a wide range of films under a single conceptual framework allowed me to grasp a definition of discontinuity in narrative cinema and re-evaluate some of the fundamental elements of the film medium.

The main case studies in this thesis share some characteristics, yet they exemplify different versions of how discontinuity has been used in filmmaking. First of all, these examples are less dependent on continuity in time, space or causality. They frequently break the linearity of the narrative, disrupt the reality of the fictional world or play with our expectations in the compositions of frames, scenes or sequences. Secondly, they emphasise their visual style so much that choices in editing, camera or lighting cannot go unnoticed. Finally, any description of these films will inevitably involve explanations about the nature of their style. In other words, their style becomes a subject they explore in their narratives. These common characteristics are visible at first sight, but after studying these films in detail, one notices a function of discontinuity that contemporary examples started to employ. By highlighting the use of a single specific stylistic element, these contemporary films

make it the film's most noticeable feature on which other stylistic elements are built. This element has a pattern or a design for us to follow, which usually progresses in a manner that is similar to the way narratives develop. By this, I mean that the use of style is initially unusual, but it sets itself as natural and consistent through the duration of the film. Although they seem discontinuous at first, these examples manage to sustain the overall continuity and meaning in the stories. Therefore, it emerges that the function of discontinuities is not always to puzzle audiences and play games, but to provide an alternative method for completing a narrative. Contemporary films discussed here exemplify this approach, one in which the form of discontinuity appears opposed to continuity in many ways, even though its function is often to build continuity.

As evident in the details of the thesis's film analyses, however, the differences between the functions of discontinuities in contemporary films and their earlier counterparts are not as clear-cut as explained. Just as there are other contemporary films that use breaks, gaps and interferences in narrative and style to create discontinuity, there are also past examples that have used discontinuities within a pattern for meaning and coherence in narratives.<sup>1</sup> The subtle distinctions between the uses of discontinuities in the examples of this thesis lie in their effects. As mentioned above, in all these films, discontinuities contribute to the content of the story, that is, their existence is meaningful. The cases of *Persona* and *Marienbad*, for instance, show us how discontinuity can dismantle the ongoing narrative; however, the sudden seizure in the former and the constant fragmentation in the latter are meaningful in their stories. Our interpretation and construction of the stories of these films involves paying attention to these forms and using them as significant elements. A similar use is evident in *Caché* and *Memento*, where the interventions such as a lack of causality

in the former and the fragmented temporality in the latter add meaning to the stories. However, in these last examples, discontinuity also becomes an instrument of continuity. The major themes that these films explore are enriched and complemented by the withheld information in *Caché* and the non-linear narrative in *Memento*. Indeed, in all these examples, discontinuities refuse to provide the audiences with the facts necessary to follow the story and they refuse to fulfill expectations, such as narrative closure, but this does not always mean that these discontinuities cannot partake in the continuity of the narrative.

In most mainstream or conventional cinema, film style establishes itself in the so-called invisible narration, a process whereby stylistic elements are not disclosed too conspicuously but subtly utilised to convey the story. In discontinuity films, some stylistic elements are emphasised individually, which makes them more explicit and leads us to think about their meaning. These films usually highlight a single stylistic element whose significance is apparent throughout the whole film. Such a use is unconventional because it intrudes upon the expected invisibility of narration, and, at first glance, it seems discontinuous because it directs our attention from the story to an element that helps to construct that story. As discussed in the thesis, our understanding of discontinuity is usually related to the continuity and coherence of a story. Anything that disrupts these is often automatically categorised as discontinuous. In fact, this view of discontinuity is quite similar to Kristin Thompson's concept of cinematic excess. According to her, 'excess is not only counternarrative; it is also counterunity' (1999: 491). Any material that does not contribute to the unity of narrative or that lacks 'motivation' to unify the work falls into the category of excess.



Examples of discontinuity such as the ending of *L'Eclisse* or the crack in *Persona* could be labelled excess. However, Thompson's notion of excess disregards the possibility that excess material, even though it is 'counternarrative', can add meaning to the content. Similar contemporary uses of discontinuity, on the other hand, could not be contained in this definition of excess because what seems to be interruptive, in films such as *Memento* or *Eternal Sunshine*, slowly becomes a regularity as they build their stories around it. The way these films normalise their discontinuities is usually through a pattern. What begins as an anomaly in the film, acquires a repetitive and constant structure that allows us to follow it easily. The unconventional stylistic element settles itself in the continuity of the film and develops as part of the narrative. Akin to the way we pay attention to the incidents or characters, we follow this element to understand its significance. In other words, the existence of such a stylistic element in the film is indispensable and it contributes to the construction of the story. In fact, as the narrative resumes, the reasons behind such a style become more obvious and even self-explanatory. Instead of breaking the story apart, discontinuity reduces ambiguity and guides us towards a resolution.

It is useful here to recall the idea of the forged distinction between style and narrative that was put forth in Chapter One. Style is undoubtedly an essential part of storytelling, constituting all the artistic elements with which a film is made. It is usually through style that the meaning is delivered and a coherent feeling is created. Narrative, on the other hand, refers to the content, the story told in the film. In this thesis, the two words are used as counterparts and the film analyses demonstrate the impracticality of drawing a line between them. Stylistic elements are a part of the narrative and cannot be ignored when studying film. V. F. Perkins's concluding words to the chapter "How" is "What" explain this well:

Synthesis here, where there is no distinction between how and what, content and form, is what interests us if we are interested in film as film. It is that unity to which we respond when film as fiction makes us sensitive to film as film. (1976: 133)

Perkins emphasises coherence, the synthesis of content and form, and he draws attention to the way meaning is created through their unity. He takes the films of Ray, Preminger and Hitchcock as examples to describe how stylistic elements are all directly related to the narratives and are all combined to create tone and meaning and to manipulate perception. Style in his examples is subtle and, thus, the meaning it contributes can only be described through the close analysis of a frame, a shot or a moment.

Examples in this thesis, on the other hand, allow stylistic elements to be individually more apparent. The contemporary discontinuity films especially construct their stories around their stylistic choices. We recognise them because they are easily visible, existing almost independently from other elements of style and narrative. In this sense, the contemporary examples encourage reflection on this anomaly when we are referring to the films' stories. The forged distinction between style and narrative has been discussed by many critics and theorists, but narrative's dominance over style has not always been dismantled. Style has usually been regarded as a supplement to the story, something that works to support the delivery of the narrative. The visibility and independence of style in contemporary examples end this supplementary role, as style becomes a subject in the narrative.

Compared to examples from the past, some contemporary films emphasise their stylistic choices in an extremely visible fashion, to the extent that it is not solely for the purpose of distinctive visual aesthetics but it also forms an important part of the content. Descriptions of *Memento* and *Dogville* will refer to their stylistic choices: the non-linear editing in the former and the use of abstract sets in the latter.

These are not only visual characteristics; they have an essential value as part of the films' narratives. The obvious style in these films, no matter how much it seems to dominate the narratives, is organic to the films in that it builds and enriches the stories. If there were linear editing in *Memento* or realistic sets and locations in *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, the films might lose a considerable amount of meaning and coherence, as well as interest. These obvious stylistic choices are at the centre of the narratives. The stories evolve from and are completed with the existence of such choices. Editing, setting, lighting, performances or framing do not only hint at the narrative, lead or point to something in it, they are a subject in the films. By drawing attention to individual stylistic elements, these examples initially disrupt the continuity of the story. They direct our attention to the process of constructing the narrative at the expense of taking a crucial temporal, causal or spatial element away from it, or halting and interrupting it. However, the attention is gradually directed back to the story because of the constant or repetitive pattern that normalises the aberration. The function of discontinuity, fragmentation and absence in these contemporary examples is to let style be a complement to the narrative. The stylistic choices are rarely subtle in these films and they are spread across all scenes. *Dogville* and *Manderlay* take place in abstract spaces; *Memento* takes place in non-linear time: the settings and the editing cannot be ignored. The difference these films engender is the manifestation of their discontinuities. Neither the existence of soundstages nor the reversed and fragmented editing are concealed; conversely, they are emphasised. In all three films, style becomes a part of the narrative: without these obvious stylistic choices, the stories would be drastically different and incomplete.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, discontinuities in these films do not disrupt; on the contrary, they complete the narratives.

One comparison I made was between the contemporary examples and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. Discontinuity in this film has a similar form, but a different function. Flashbacks, jump-cuts and abrupt changes in space, time or causality are obvious. *Marienbad* is based on the notion that it is impossible to achieve a unity or continuity with the narrative, the characters or space and time. The principle of narrative construction in the film is that it will fail to maintain wholeness and coherence. There is actually no end nor beginning, but only images that run after one another. One senses while watching it that something has happened, is about to happen or maybe is happening elsewhere. Characters are vague; time and space are not solid. The entirety of the film's story can be found in the repeating words and their accompanying images. The conflicts between yes and no, then and now, him and her are reflected through the juxtaposition of these images. These images are presented to us in disorder; they are shot and edited incoherently. *Marienbad*'s narrative is incomplete and indefinite: the film prevents any hermeneutic interpretation.

In *Marienbad* the function of discontinuity is to disrupt, and, even more, to underline the existence of this disruption. The exploitation of discontinuities in the contemporary films discussed in this thesis is similar; the different functions these discontinuities employ depend on the ways in which the films incorporate them in their narratives. In the case of *Marienbad*, pattern and order are broken, whereas in *Memento*, *Dogville* and *Manderlay* discontinuities have a consistency or an order. Correspondingly, unlike *Marienbad*, discontinuities in the other examples form the backbone for continuity. This form or function creates less ambiguity; the meanings it produces are more direct and less open to interpretation. If *Marienbad* builds itself upon oppositions and infinite probabilities of interpretations of the same incident,

contemporary examples, no matter how discontinuous they appear, rely on the coherence of a narrative. It is harder to find a story that falls apart: discontinuities exist not to disrupt, but to maintain continuity with their contribution to the narrative in terms of meaning. For instance, *Memento*'s structure influences the story; the soundstages in *Dogville* and *Manderlay* relate to the communities of the town and the plantation. The use of style in all three films is unfamiliar and thus requires us at first to accustom ourselves to it, but the discontinuities never interrupt our involvement with their narratives; they help to strengthen and deepen them.

The fragmentation in *Marienbad* seemingly looks similar to the fragmented style of the contemporary films discussed in this chapter. Its main difference, however, is in its relationship with the narrative. *Marienbad* does not offer a narrative. We can never build up a meaningful story with its structure, which remains in fragments forever. *Marienbad* is an extreme example of a film that discloses the means of narrative production and disrupts our attention for the purpose of disrupting; discontinuity is emphasised to break the narrative and our involvement with the story world. *Marienbad* takes this disruption further to destroy the story completely: there is nothing else but disruption. The style in *Dogville*, *Manderlay* and *Memento*, on the other hand, functions as an instrument of continuity in the narrative. We see and accept the town and the plantation as they are presented to us – minimally decorated soundstages; we see and accept the non-linearity in the narrative of *Memento* because the first couple of scenes instruct us how to follow this discontinuity. This discontinuous nature is a given fact from the beginning of the films, similar to *Marienbad*, and it will remain as it is, only to contribute to the films' narratives, not to break them. One of the main differences between these two uses is that the function of discontinuity has shifted from intervention to conjunction by employing a pattern.

Although it may seem as if these stylistic choices undermine the narrative in contemporary cinema, actually they support and create a depth for it. They are not purely to create mind-games, to present spectacular views or to astonish and shock. Instead of dominating, disrupting or destroying the narrative, as in earlier examples of discontinuous films, such as *Marienbad*, contemporary examples use discontinuity to complete the narrative, providing cues for the viewers to follow it.

Narratives are constructs that are designed to seem continuous. Paradoxically, though, no narrative will be absolute and without pauses, disorders and gaps. Much storytelling strives to reduce any incoherence and deficiency so that we follow the narratives. The analyses in this thesis demonstrate that discontinuities have become more visible in certain contemporary films, in that there is no precondition of concealing their existence to communicate the narrative. The recent examples discussed here have suggested that it is possible to redefine the engagement of style and narrative by transforming discontinuities into continuities; fragmentation can be used as a method to achieve totality. Breaks, full stops and parentheses in the narrative are marked by jump-cuts, freeze-frames and flashbacks.<sup>3</sup> These stylistic choices are not new; the difference is that in the past they were usually not indicated in the narrative unless they were used as conscious disruptions. In the contemporary examples, however, these choices work to maintain the continuity and coherence of the story, even though they are in the form of abrupt breaks. As discontinuities are emphasised, they become more visible to the eye, hence they transform and become a part of narrative continuity. The use of oppositions such as absence and presence, order and disorder, and sound and silence is common in most of these examples. The absence of something may substitute for its presence; the disorder of scenes in a film might disorientate us first, but it gradually employs a pattern to turn it into order.

As quoted in the previous chapters, Gilberto Perez writes in *The Material Ghost*: ‘A narrative is not just a story, something that happened or is imagined to have happened, but a story told: not a sequence that happened but a sequence made’ (2000: 51). Discontinuity, absence and fragmentation urge us to follow the way the narrative sequence is made, which has an essential contribution to the meaning of the story. Perez continues his discussion with a comparison of painting and narrative. He writes,

A painting is the opposite of a narrative: it is there all at once. It may contain a story [...] but the story is put in simultaneous form. Narrative makes life into a sequence; painting makes life into a simultaneity [...] [T]he narrative sequence is not a fact of the story, the life recounted, but an arrangement given to that life in the process of recounting it. (2000: 51)

It is harder to understand Perez’s distinction between painting as a simultaneity and narrative as a sequence when the counting in the narrative, its narration, is either discontinuous or interrupted. The narrative can be a discontinuous sequence of simultaneities, its meaning lying in the construction of each simultaneity as much as the order. The fragmented structure of *Eternal Sunshine*, for instance, encourages an engagement with individual scenes without suggesting that we be too concerned about trying to put them in a rational order. Through this direction, it emphasises the significance of moments as they are imprinted or misprinted in the memory. In this film, the processes of recording, remembering and not forgetting are crucial subjects that it explores. In a similar manner, the inconclusiveness of the causes behind the blackmails in *Caché*’s story triggers the protagonist’s hidden sense of guilt, which is the film’s central theme. Although the film progresses chronologically, it is the sequences of blackmail videos, the protagonist’s remembrances and his dreams that contain all the significant details that may lead to answers to the questions that the

film poses. These sequences are moments that require a long look and suggest thinking beyond what is visible.

The uses of discontinuities in the main case analyses of this thesis are obvious. These are conscious storytelling tools that the filmmakers have used to shape the films' stories. In order to test the validity of discontinuity as a critical concept, this thesis has also briefly looked at films that are not discontinuous. More than being stylistic choices, breaks, fragments and pauses in conventional narratives can signpost crucial causal, temporal and spatial elements in the films' stories. Detailed analyses of discontinuities in a film enable us to scrutinize its themes, the meanings it produces and the effects it leaves on us, thus contributes to the richness of film interpretations.

### **Suggestions for further study**

This thesis has explored the definition of discontinuity in cinema, considering how this term can be useful in understanding individual films and cinematic storytelling. What began as an observation about a change in the way contemporary films look developed into a discussion of possible frameworks for conceptualising discontinuity. My intention here was not to *prove* the existence of something but instead to examine a rarely discussed concept in order to come up with questions about storytelling in cinema, questions which have not been exhaustively posed yet in film studies. In addition, of course, my aim was to examine the ways in which this concept can be useful in our understanding of films. The key discovery was that discontinuity can undertake a variety of functions that contribute to the richness of a film's style and narrative. Looking at discontinuity as a concept on its own and not in opposition to continuity opened up new perspectives from which to evaluate it. The in-depth analyses in this thesis demonstrate that discontinuities do not always result in



a discontinuity effect; conversely narrative continuity can be achieved through their use. Discontinuity is a storytelling device that filmmakers sometimes use, but it is also a critical concept that we can apply in our film interpretations. Tackling discontinuities in films opens up new discussions of meanings in films, which may be overlooked otherwise.

The change in the function and frequency of digital technologies apparently overlaps with the spread of discontinuity films and this concurrence calls for an exploration of the links between technology and style. It is possible to assert that discontinuity is a characteristic of digital technology, hence digital storytelling. Not only discontinuity can be explained by reference to digital technology, the media that it produces such as video games make use of non-linear narratives and interactivity, traces of which we can find in contemporary films. During the last couple of decades, advances of digital technologies in different media have been changing the ways in which we produce and communicate things in everyday life. The impact of this is not only apparent in the increasing simplicity and familiarity of filmmaking devices, but also in the intensifying blurriness between professional and amateur practices.<sup>4</sup> In other words, digital technology has converged different media as much as it has simplified and standardised their use. Moreover, non-linear narratives, faster cuts, without temporal and spatial specificity, or other unconventional uses of stylistic elements in contemporary cinema are all frequently associated with this new period of image production due to the obviously fragmented nature of new digital technologies. These are indeed immediate connections based on the parallelism between the nature of the processes and the results that digital production offers and the attributes of the obvious recent increase in unconventional stylistic uses in films. Nevertheless, these issues bring to mind two questions: 1) is there a direct connection between the

emergence of such a use and the introduction of digital technologies and new media? and 2) how do advancements in digital filmmaking influence artistic choices and film aesthetics? A further study could examine in detail the impact of recent digital technologies on the contemporary examples of discontinuity. As a recent article notes, there appears to be a visible rise of films that ‘dispense with storytelling conventions’ (Scott and Dargis, 2012) supported by new digital technologies. This rise in the last couple of decades could be studied as a new tendency in filmmaking with reference to its economic, social and cultural structures.<sup>5</sup>

In my study, I did not take any theories and apply them to my writing. Rather I chose to follow the steps of those critics and writers whose studies have been most influential on me and emulate their way of writing as a method. Close analysis or *looking* at films in detail and trying to *see* what is on the screen is evidently my priority in this research. The thesis was conducted similar to the way that one devises an idea, rather than through the application of a theory to find out or prove something. In this sense, the film interpretations are arguments and the results that I have come up with are not facts. They could easily be re-formed into new questions that could be studied further, borrowing theories from other disciplines. One angle that could be scrutinised further is the relationship between discontinuity and desire: is discontinuity related to evoking desire? The desire for a coherent meaning and a continuous narrative is left unfulfilled with the use of discontinuity. However, it is this desire that is played with in what many scholars call ‘puzzle films’. Coherence and continuity are finalised through ‘solving’ discontinuities, which fulfils the desire.<sup>6</sup>

During this research, I have come to the conclusion that filmmaking is essentially an inquiry into and a confrontation with the inherent characteristics of cinematic devices, such as the objective lens of the camera and the duration of the

projected filmstrip. When these are coupled with the problematic of storytelling, a tension arises, and, through this tension, new possibilities of filmmaking are born. Another relationship between discontinuity and desire can be set through the perceptions of the filmmaker and the audience. There is a difference between our desire and the filmmaker's desire that results in a conversation and a negotiation between them. Discontinuities are conscious and intentional choices by the filmmaker and they point at these desires on different sides.

Another subject for further research could be outlining a history of discontinuity in film. Discontinuity – as well as absence and fragmentation – is generally attached to modernist art movements as a defining characteristic. Likewise in cinema, such stylistic uses are more evident in modernist films as well. However, as demonstrated in the examples of this thesis, discontinuity exists in a variety of films from different periods, having different forms and functions. A historical exploration of uses of discontinuity could offer us the development of such uses, if there is one, and also present us with similarities, differences and possible influences between different periods.

### **Concluding words on works of art and criticism**

As stated in many parts of this research, my main concern has been to understand how and why we get certain effects, feelings and meanings out of films: how does the *how* in the film constitute the *what*? As Gombrich writes,

it needs the critic's artifice to make us aware of the artist's. For all the thought and work that must have gone into the construction of such a complex configuration disappears from consciousness when we see the finished picture. We are not aware of confronting a *tour de force* in composition; what we admire is an image of serene and relaxed simplicity. (1985: 70)

The job of the film critic is to *point to* those things that produce the striking effects of the work of art and to do this by trusting her/his own experience.<sup>7</sup> This is not and cannot be a scientific process whereby some facts are discovered but an inquiry into what the work of art reveals combined with one's own intimate reactions to it. As Oscar Wilde states, 'the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself' (1997: 139). Similarly Cavell points at the authority and trust of 'one's own experience [...] expressed as a willingness to find words for it' (Quoted in Klevan 2005: 121); Bazin writes, 'The function of criticism is not to carry on a silver platter a truth which never did exist, but to prolong as much as possible in the intelligence and sensibility of those who read it the original shock of the work of art' (Quoted in Warren 2007: 22). According to both of these writers,<sup>8</sup> films show or reveal things and the purpose of criticism is to articulate what we see on the screen, what it is made up of and how it generates a diversity of ideas, feelings and effects.

Works of art pass something onto us and criticism is an incessant process that strives to reach the gist that lies in the multitude of possibilities of meaning and strands of thought. That is how, even if we do not notice, works of art produce an effect on us and that is how they invite multiple viewings: to understand the multiplicities.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the main chapters, *Citizen Kane* (1941) is a famous narrative film that uses discontinuity to tell its story. *Zorn's Lemma's* (1970) discontinuous structure, on the other hand, has a pattern that is easy to follow, which develops similar to a narrative even though it is an experimental non-narrative film. Both in *The Tree of Life* (Terence Malick, 2011) and in *Holy Motors* (Leos Carax, 2012), on the other hand, certain questions regarding the central subjects remain as mysteries; discontinuities increase ambiguities rather than being used systematically to put things in order.

<sup>2</sup> These are films in which reasons for discontinuities are explained to a certain extent or they are made obvious. When the situation is reversed, the functions of discontinuities seem arbitrary, as some critics claimed for the style in *Post Tenebras Lux* (Carlos Reygadas, 2012). In fact, Reygadas complains about the general view of films that 'circumstances surrounding the story must always be clearly established, that characters have to be neatly introduced to the audience, flashbacks must always be defined as that, etc. [...] if a film is confusing [...] then it must become clear that confusion is the subject-matter' (Solórzano 2013: 52).

<sup>3</sup> Many discontinuity films exemplify these. For instance, *21 Grams* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2003) does it with the order of sequences and the link between them is revealed much later. In *Takeshis* (Takeshi Kitano, 2005) the story cuts back and forth without notice between the storylines of two protagonists played by the same actor. *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2006) operates on a number of levels of consciousness without explaining what they are; *Synecdoche, New York's* (Charlie Kaufman, 2008) narrative continues towards infinity on a spiral-like path full of recurrences. In a similar manner, *Inception's* (Christopher Nolan, 2010) characters travel to alternate realities in a deathly escape.

<sup>4</sup> Big film companies such as Kodak and Fuji are discontinuing the production of some of their film rolls used in still photography because of the popularity of digital cameras. Although no dates have been announced yet for the discontinuation of 35 mm films used in movies, such a decision will possibly take place in the foreseeable future dominated by digital production processes.

<sup>5</sup> Scott and Dargis point at the abundance of similar films released in 2012: 'We live in interesting narrative times, cinematically. In *Cloud Atlas* characters jump across centuries, space and six separate stories into a larger tale about human interconnectedness. In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy's doomed heroine suffers against visibly artificial sets, a doll within an elaborate dollhouse, while in *Life of Pi* a boy and a tiger share a small boat in a very big sea amid long silences, hallucinatory visuals and no obvious story arc. In movies like these, as well as in *The Master* and *Holy Motors*, filmmakers are pushing hard against, and sometimes dispensing with, storytelling conventions, and audiences seem willing to follow them' (2012). They call this 'tendency' a very expensive and risky business due to their budgets.

<sup>6</sup> Many viewers complain about the blandness of these puzzle films; once the mystery is solved, they are no longer 'desirable' and they lose the richness experienced in the first viewing. This could be investigated within the psychoanalytical discourse of the Other proposed by Lacan. The Self is structured against the Other that has a Lack.

Scott and Dargis similarly point to the appeal of the puzzles and summarise their effect: 'The divide seems to be not between people who "get it" and those who don't, but rather between those who are frustrated by not getting it and those who enjoyed it even though we didn't get it' (2012).

<sup>7</sup> I borrow the word 'to point' from Clement Greenberg who claims that 'aesthetic judgments are confined to pointing and quoting' (1999: 16).

<sup>8</sup> My understanding of criticism developed from the approaches of all the writers mentioned in this final section as well as Perez, Wood and Perkins whose writings have been most influential in this thesis. Andrew Britton's 'In Defence of Criticism' (1986), Robin Wood's 'In Defence of Art: On Current Tendencies in Film Criticism' (2006b) and Gilberto Perez's introduction to his *The Material Ghost* (2000), 'Film and Physics' need special mentioning.

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